

# Insight

## A Parent's guide to Accreditation

### State & Private Accreditation

First, it is important to clarify terminology. Accreditation takes two forms: State and private. Private accreditation, such as through the Association of Classical and Christian Schools, provides those considering our school with a sense of accountability and oversight in the operation of the school and provides colleges with a greater sense of credibility. In some cases, private accreditation may have meaning for students who transfer between schools within the same accrediting body. For example, ACCS accredited schools can transfer student credits more easily with other ACCS schools.

State accreditation in the State of Idaho is currently administered only through a semi-private accrediting organization called the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges and Universities (NASCU). Having state-recognized accreditation provides three primary benefits over private accreditation in Idaho: 1) State-recognized accreditation allows transferring of student credits between state accredited high-schools, 2) it permits private schools to participate in many high-school athletic competitions and 3) Students receive a diploma from a state-recognized school.

The Ambrose School has chosen to seek accreditation by the ACCS, but not through the state accreditation system. We are on candidacy status with the ACCS and will undergo full accreditation in 2006.

### How will our accreditation affect your student?

For students in grades k-8, accreditation matters very little except as an assurance to parents that our school is accountable to an accreditation body. Since the ACCS has standards that are more rigorous than most other accrediting agencies, parents can be confident that The Ambrose School is providing a quality education.

For The Ambrose School students in grades 9-12, there may be some minor complications related to our accreditation status. Depending on the high-school, it may be difficult to transfer credits if a student chooses to transfer before they graduate. Most colleges are accustomed to admitting students with diplomas from academic institutions that are not recognized by the state (homeschool, unaccredited charter schools or private schools, etc.). Some of these colleges may require additional testing, such as the SAT Subject Matter tests. In the end, other Classical Christian schools have proven that college admittance is not a problem for our graduates. Please see our Insight on "No Better Preparation for College: Classical Christian Education."

Another consequence of our accreditation status is that we cannot compete in state sanctioned state or district championships for most sports or activities. We hope you will agree that these minor issues are far outweighed by the numerous advantages that students gain through classical, Christian education.

## **Important reasons why The Ambrose School does not seek State accreditation...**

As a practical matter, state accreditation places demands on private educators that make classical education difficult or impossible (unless tuition were to be raised to \$7000-\$10,000 per year—which is unaffordable for most parents).<sup>1</sup>

Public schools spend in excess of \$6000 per student per year in Idaho (not including facilities) and often have class sizes in excess of 30 students. The Ambrose School educates students for about \$4000 per student per year (including our facility) with an average class size of 15 or 20. How is this possible? Much of the money spent in State accredited schools is mandated overhead. Here are a few examples of how these costs impact state accredited schools:

**1) One full-time school counselor is required per 400 students.** This position would cost The Ambrose School between \$45,000-\$65,000 annually and consume office space that could serve as classroom or lab space. It would also remove 1 ½ teachers from the classroom. Classical and Christian education affirms the authority of the parents and expects the parents or pastors to fulfill many of the roles assigned to school counselors. Our principal counsels on matters of education.

**2) One full-time library and media specialist is required per 250 students.** This position would cost The Ambrose School over \$35,000 annually. It would remove 1 teacher from the classroom. We presently have parents volunteering for this function and doing a fine job.

**3) Hiring state certified teachers.** A certified teacher is one who has completed a specific state certified educational degree at a college or university and participates in continuing education. This presents two problems for The Ambrose School.

**Retraining Teachers--** Modern progressive education is the philosophy taught in education colleges. This form of training is contradictory to classical education. Fundamentally, it treats education as a scientific exercise which serves to instill skill and knowledge. It does not generally recognize or value our creation in the image of God, the need for moral training, or the existence of the non-material world (beauty, truth, goodness, etc.). We are careful about hiring State certified teachers for this reason. We typically have to retrain them to teach according to classical philosophy and a true Christian worldview. To help accomplish this, we send them to a classical Christian teacher training. To more fully understand this issue, please read the books on our reading list, or the booklet “Discover” Classical and Christian Education available from our office.

**An Untapped Source of Teachers--** Second, we find that certification restricts our pool of teachers. Most of our present teachers are uncertified. We have had teachers with master’s degrees in education who have been unable to teach in our environment. On the other hand, we have had engineers, nurses, college professors, commercial chemists, writers, and other highly qualified “non-certified” teachers who are excellent teachers.

This second issue often comes down to economics. With public schools competing for certified teachers, we struggle to find good talent within this pool willing to work for the wages offered in private education. However, by selecting teachers from a willing pool of professionals who do not happen to have the “right” certification to teach in other schools, we effectively recruit some of the best talent in our business.

We have been blessed with many great teachers who are qualified by their performance in the classroom. Teaching is a gift, not a skill learned in college (although proper training can help). We would lose many of our best teachers if we accepted state accreditation. Once we hire teachers, they undergo training through the ACCS as soon as is practical.

4) **Physical plant requirements:** To house and operate with school counselors and administrators who must have individual offices, expensive space would need to be procured. This would take away from classroom investment.

## Examining the “Principle” of State Accreditation

In principle, The Ambrose School disagrees with the jurisdiction of the state in education. Scripturally, the family is placed in authority over the education of children. It is not a function of government. This may seem a distant application of scripture, but principles have a way of creating foundational problems if they are ignored.

State accreditation is managed and operated by the same values as the administrators that run educational colleges and unions. It should be no surprise that the values of state accrediting organizations are aligned with the educational philosophies that have derailed the public schools. Some of these principles include:

- **“Progressivism”**—The overarching belief system of the educational establishment. The belief that man has evolved socially to cast off superstitious concepts of God and traditional morality. In its place, a new morality is evolving as we become enlightened. The “new morality” includes elements like environmentalism (man has no importance beyond that of any other animal), multi-culturalism (all cultures are equally good—except Western culture because of its inherrant claim to be superior), individualism (the individual’s rights and wishes are always moral and supreme—everyone should be able to do what they want, as long as it doesn’t directly violate someone else’s individual rights), and an egalitarian form of socialism (everyone is equally capable and should have the same level of wealth).
- **Materialism**—The principle that we are products of time, chance, and matter. If there is no relevant spiritual component to children, they should be taught in a secular environment. From

this foundation, education is believed to be vocational rather than moral.

- **Egalitarian vs. excellence**—The principle that there is no such thing as “better”, just different. This is often seen as progressive educators try to eliminate grading or inflate everyone’s grade to an “A”. We also see public education investing extensive resources in poor performers at the expense of average children in an attempt to create equality. Excellence is sacrificed so that everyone can feel as though they are equally capable.

- **Scientific rather than a human approach**—Progressive educators believe that educating children should be approached through experimental progression. That is, old ways should be discarded in favor of ever newer, more novel methods. Over time, it is believed, this will improve education. While this may be partially true, modern educators reward experimentation and resist accountability. “Ever changing and never improving” as one international report on American education put it.

- **“It takes a village”**—Children are the responsibility of the community, not their parents. Therefore, children require protection from harmful ideals associated with Judeo-Christian or other religious values. They also require training in the “new morality”. This view regards it as dangerous to allow a few radical individuals to raise radical children, so we must discourage any form of education which exists outside the control of the state.

*Of course, not all or even most educators consciously believe all of these things.* However, these principles find their way into the state accreditation criteria through the educational establishment that governs the process. Progressive educators have an interest in maintaining the positions and systems that they control in order to further their values. Many of the NASCU (state) requirements can be traced to the above philosophies.

State accreditation encourages many elements in line with modern, progressive education, but contrary to classical education. While not every element is strictly required, the school must justify any variance. It is unlikely The Ambrose School would be granted the number of variances required. These elements are too numerous to mention in detail, but a few examples are provided below:<sup>2</sup>

- “The program of studies meets the requirements of the state.” State testing, now influences detailed content. The imbalance in subject matter is disturbing. For example, whole tests are required on “environmental science” with a very limited history requirement.
- “Written code of [student] conduct ... cooperatively designed by students, staff, administration and patrons.” We use absolute standards set in scripture as judged by the administration and board with input from parents. No students are consulted about our code.
- “Students have access to... developmental counseling... school psychological services.” We provide none of these services because they would go beyond the authority the parents are delegating to The Ambrose School. They are not part of education as we define it.
- “Programs and activities designed to reach all students.” We realize that, to achieve excellence, some students will not be able to perform all activities. Progressive educators will prioritize “inclusion” over “excellence”. However, our absolute standards will not be compromised to “dumb down” our education so that it can be accessible to every student, all the time. Of course, we believe each student is a child of God and therefore should be appreciated as such. (see “Egalitarian” above)
- “... a lay person with a college degree... is under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher at all times.” This imposes a further restriction on our use of non-certified teachers,

even for part-time activity. We employ math teachers and others for 1 hour per day. They have their own class, and are not supervised—nor do they need to be. They are occasionally monitored for quality assessments.

- “The school’s ... literature is not offensive or negative against other schools or educational agencies.” While it is not our practice to engage in negative advertising, some material, like our parent testimonials, occasionally contain references to “when my child was in public school”. This comparison would limit our ability to make clear distinctions between our form of education and others.
- “Innovative... and experimental programs... are desirable factors that distinguish good schools.” We don’t experiment on our students. We occasionally innovate as we return to tested methods that were known to work. This can require some trial time as we restore ideas. However, we do not look to experiments as our educational guide.

In summary, both the principles of education and the practice of education would be adversely affected if The Ambrose School were to seek state accreditation. While there are a few benefits to this accreditation, our students’ success is not dependent on these benefits. We believe the students and families are best served by remaining independent of the state educational system.

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<sup>1</sup> Other private Christian schools are state accredited and charge less, but they do not employ the same type of teachers or have the small class sizes required for Classical Christian education.

<sup>2</sup> NASCU Accreditation Requirements 2003