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I. OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

History of VCEA Accreditation Process

The Virginia Catholic Education Association was formed in 1986 at the initiative of the two Catholic school superintendents in the State of Virginia, Dr. Lois King Draina of the Diocese of Richmond and Rev. William F. Davis, OSFS, of the Diocese of Arlington. The primary responsibility of VCEA was to oversee the self-study process for accreditation of schools in the Diocese of Arlington and Richmond. The Association created and successfully implemented the Design for Excellence Program.

Acknowledging the continued need to maintain a process that would encourage school communities to confront the diverse approaches to creating a learning community for the 21st century, in 1993 the VCEA accreditation committee accepted the task of revising the Design for Excellence process. In 1994, the first draft of the revised Design for Excellence was written. The format was a response to a shifting paradigm of learning. This new approach demanded an integrated strategy to the formation of a Christ-centered learning environment already immersed in a rapidly changing technological society. The shifting of society into an era of interdependency required schools to recognize the unique ways individuals learn and to design an educational process that creates an environment which fosters creative, challenging, and ever-changing responses to the ultimate goal of academic excellence.

In 1995-96, the revised Design for Excellence was piloted by Holy Spirit School, Diocese of Arlington and St. Edward-Epiphany School, Diocese of Richmond. In 1996-97, the final revisions were made and the new document published. The March 1997 Accreditation Workshop for all school administrators in both diocese is a reflection of the VCEA continued commitment to promote excellence in Catholic education.

During the 1999-2000 school year, the Design for Excellence instrument was updated to meet the requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, thus enabling the high schools to seek accreditation through the Design for Excellence process. The Virginia Secondary and Middle Schools Committee acknowledged acceptance of the DFE document as a criteria for School Improvement in October 2001.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the Arlington Diocese revised the Design for Excellence instrument. The Richmond Diocese pursued the SACS District Model, developing the Design for Growth instrument/process for accrediting schools.

Given the fact that there are a number of excellent K-12 accreditation programs throughout the country, and in respecting the diversity of our Catholic schools in the Commonwealth, the VCEA Executive Board respects the autonomy of both dioceses and thus endorses the use of Design for Excellence (DFE), Design for Growth (DFG) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) processes.
Non-Discrimination Policy of Virginia Catholic Education Association

Catholic Schools, within Virginia Catholic Education Association (VCEA), comply with those constitutional and statutory provisions, and provide equal opportunity to all qualified employees and applicants for employment, as may be required of and as may be specifically applicable to the schools, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, marital status, disability, national origin, or citizenship in the administration of their educational, personnel, admissions, financial aid, athletic and other school administered programs.

VCEA reserves the right, however, to determine whether and under what circumstances priority should be given to Catholics for certain employment positions. In addition, for Catholic employees, conformance with religious tenets of the Catholic faith is a condition of employment, and all employees are prohibited from performing, teaching or advocating in the workplace any practices or doctrines which are inconsistent with religious tenets of the Catholic faith. Consistent with the foregoing, it is the policy and practice of VCEA to promote equal opportunity in employment, promotions, wages, benefits, and all other privileges, terms and conditions of employment.

This policy does not preclude the existence of single sex schools, nor does it conflict with the priority given to Catholics for admission as students. This policy also does not preclude the ability of the Catholic Dioceses to undertake and/or enforce appropriate actions with respect to applicants or students who teach or advocate on school property or at school functions any practices or doctrines which are inconsistent with religious tenets of the Catholic faith.
Goals of the VCEA

The goals of the VCEA are:

- To maintain and improve the quality of elementary and secondary Catholic schools in Virginia;
- To approve and endorse accreditation processes for Catholic schools that foster educational excellence in the setting of a school faith community;
- To represent the Catholic school community of Virginia in discussions with public and other private school personnel and before public agencies and bodies whose decisions affect Catholic schools; and
- To partner with the Virginia Catholic Conference, when appropriate, in matters related to education.

Annual Report

A VCEA annual report will be available on the Office of Catholic Schools website.

The report will include:

- Fact Sheet
- Accomplishments
- Finances
- Accreditation Register
- Membership Directory
Administrative Protocols

A. Financial records as well as “official” minutes are kept at the Office of Catholic Schools in the Arlington Diocese.

B. In the event DFE, DFG, or SACS reports submitted to a visiting team are incomplete or poorly written, the chairperson of the visiting team is to inform the Office of Catholic Schools for the respective Diocese. At that point, the Office of Catholic Schools will notify the school that its plan needs to be revised prior to the school continuing its respective accreditation process.

C. At the annual spring VCEA meeting, the budget for the new year will be approved. Subsequent to that approval, VCEA annual dues are mailed to all members with payment due September 30th of the school year.

D. Accreditation Policy on School Mergers

When a merger occurs between two accredited schools, the accreditation maintenance schedule of the school accredited first will be followed. The earliest schedule for a merged school self-study will be two years.

E. Accreditation Status Wording

In order to standardize the language and clarify the relationship between a school, an accrediting association, the VCPE and the Virginia State Board of Education, the VCPE has specified the following wording schools should use when describing their accreditation.

Specifically, for any school accredited by the VCEA, the following sentence should be used in its entirety:

“[name of school] is accredited by the Virginia Catholic Education Association (VCEA) whose accreditation process has been approved by the Virginia Council for Private Education Committee on Accreditation as authorized by the Virginia State Board of Education.”

Schools which are members of, but not accredited by, the VCEA should not use the above language.

F. Managing Records for Closing Schools

When an existing parish school closes, personnel and student records will be sent to the parish where they will be archived and retained for the duration as stipulated by the State of Virginia. When an existing regional or inter-parish school closes, personnel and student records will be sent to one of the participating parishes as determined by the Office of Catholic Schools. When an existing diocesan high school closes, personnel and student records will be sent to one of the diocesan high schools as determined by the Office of Catholic Schools. (Diocese of Arlington)
II. MEMBERSHIP

Virginia Council for Private Education

The Virginia Council for Private Education (VCPE) was organized in 1974 as the Virginia affiliate of the National Council for American Private Education (CAPE), which has headquarters in Washington, D.C. VCPE oversees accreditation of nonpublic preschool, elementary and secondary schools in the Commonwealth. VCPE facilitates a statewide framework for communication and cooperation among private schools, their public school counterparts, state and local governments, and other agencies and organizations.

The VCEA is a member of the VCPE and, as such, will collectively pay annual VCPE school dues after collecting VCEA dues from each school.

The VCPE association assessment will be paid from the VCEA annual operating budget.

Fees

VCEA Annual Membership Fee is largely determined by:

- VCPE fee structure and
- VCEA administrative expenses.

Payments are due by September 15th each year.

All fees are to be made payable to the Virginia Catholic Education Association and should be mailed to:

VCEA
200 North Glebe Road
Suite 503
Arlington, VA 22203
III. ACCREDITATION

VCEA Accreditation Program

The VCEA Accreditation Program is a six-year (5-year for SACS) cyclical process for growth that emphasizes total school improvement and examines a new learning paradigm. It is a process which requires looking at a school as a composite and encourages dialogue among the entire faculty. Collaboration and inspiration assist the school in challenging itself for the future through its goals and objectives and through its integration of faith and learning.

The Design for Excellence requires that the school and the visiting committee focus on eight major facets of the school: Faith Community, Leadership, Curriculum, Personnel, Service, Governance/Finance, Demographics and Facility. The evaluation of Governance and Finance is new within the VCEA evaluation process, as Governance has never been analyzed before and the schools had never been asked to develop five year financial plans. At the conclusion of the visit, the visiting committee votes on Minimum Standards pertinent to each of the above areas. Following the visit, the VCEA Accreditation Committee awards accreditation based on the visiting committee report and vote on Minimum Standards. Once accreditation is awarded, the school submits a plan for improvement (due on March 1st if the Visiting Committee evaluated the school in the fall, and November 1st if the Visiting Committee's evaluation occurred the previous spring) to the VCEA Accreditation Committee, and the VCEA monitors progress on the annual goals of each school.

The “Design for Growth” requires that the school and the visiting team focus on nine major facets of the school: Continuous Development of a Christ-Centered Environment, Effectiveness of Catholic Identity, Vision and Purpose, Governance and Leadership, Teaching and Learning, Documenting and Using Results, Resources and Support Systems, Stakeholder Communication and Relationships, Commitment to Continuous Improvement. At the conclusion of the visit, the visiting team reaches consensus on the fulfillment of the standards, the level of demonstration of continuous improvement and the provision of quality assurance. Following the visit, the visiting team determines the school's compliance with diocesan requirements as a school within the district and recommends the awarding of a new grant of SACS accreditation. The visiting team submits its report to the Office of Catholic Schools, who determines the school eligibility for maintaining SACS accreditation though the Diocesan district. The Office of Catholic Schools submits its successful peer review reports to the VCEA Accreditation Committee, who determines that the school is in compliance with VCEA guidelines, and awards VCEA accreditation to the school.

Schools in the Diocese of Richmond must submit annual reports, including goals for the current year to the Office of Catholic Schools, who together with the Quality Review Board, reviews the annual report and monitors completion of the goals.

The “SACS” program requires that the school and the visiting team focus on eight major facets of the school: Continuous Development of a Christ-Centered Environment/Effectiveness of Catholic Identity, Vision and Purpose, Governance and Leadership, Teaching and Learning, Documenting and Using Results, Resources and Support Systems, Stakeholder Communication and Relationships, Commitment to Continuous Improvement. At the
conclusion of the visit, *the visiting team* reaches consensus on the fulfillment of the standards, the level of demonstration of continuous improvement and the provision of quality assurance. Following the visit, *the visiting team* determines the school’s compliance with diocesan requirements as a school within the district and recommends the *awarding of a new grant of SACS accreditation*. *The visiting team* submits its report to the Office of Catholic Schools, who determines the school eligibility for maintaining SACS accreditation. The Office of Catholic Schools submits its successful peer review reports to the VCEA Accreditation Committee, who determines that the school is in compliance with VCEA guidelines, and awards VCEA accreditation to the school.

Schools must submit annual reports, including goals for the current year to the Office of Catholic Schools, who reviews the annual report and monitors completion of the goals.
Staff Preparation, Development and Certification in a VCEA School

A. Staff Preparation

To be employed in a Catholic school and to be certified in a professional educational capacity by either the Virginia Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Virginia or the Virginia Catholic Education Association as authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia will require the following minimum signs of educational preparation:

1. Teachers
   a. A bachelor’s degree, possession of a valid teaching certificate from a State Department of Education and six semester hours within the last five-year period;
   b. A bachelor’s degree with evidence of adequate academic credit, which is a minimum of 15 college credits gained in academic courses related to teaching assignments and a minimum of 6 college credits in the field of education, including six semester hours within the last five-year period; with a requirement for schools seeking accreditation through Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to ensure compliance with the SACS requirements for school accreditation;
   c. Demonstrated compliance with Virginia Technology Standards for Instructional Personnel (TSIP’s); and
   d. Compliance with diocesan child abuse prevention requirements.

2. Administrators
   a. A Master’s degree, possession of a valid administrator’s certificate from a State Department of education; or
   b. A bachelor’s degree with evidence of satisfactory pursuit of:
      1) A master’s degree, including six semester hours within the last five-year period, and
      2) An administrator’s certificate.

Those persons without minimum certification requirements may be hired provided they are gaining academic credit at a minimum rate of at least six (6) credits per year and will attain a valid administrator’s certificate within three (3) years from being hired;

   c. Demonstrated compliance with Virginia Technology Standards for Instructional Personnel (TSIP’s) and,
   d. Compliance with diocesan child abuse prevention requirements.
B. Staff Development and Continuing Certification

1. Continued staff development will be required of each professional educator. Personnel who have been issued Virginia Department of Education licenses or VCEA certificates must renew these licenses/certificates every five years. The process described in the current Virginia Recertification Manual will be used for renewal of both Virginia licenses and VCEA certificates. This includes the requirement for all persons without master’s degrees to acquire three semester hours at either the undergraduate or graduate level in their area of endorsement.

2. Each school shall have a functioning program for ongoing supervision of each staff performance.

3. Each school shall have a functioning program for ongoing professional staff development.

4. Each school shall follow the diocesan guidelines for catechist preparation and development, including catechist certification.

C. Certification

1. Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Licensure: Staff members who, as of July 1, 1985, hold a valid VDOE license, should fulfill their continuing staff development responsibilities, and process the documentation necessary to obtain or renew that license through the Office of Catholic Schools.

   Staff members holding VDOE licenses should renew that license rather than seeking other licensure or certification.

2. VCEA Certification: Newly employed staff members who do not hold a VDOE license and who meet the minimum requirements for staff preparation in a VCEA school may be granted a VCEA certificate.

   All VCEA certificates are valid for a five-year period.

3. To apply for a VCEA certificate from the Diocese of Arlington, the following documents must either be submitted to or be on file with the Office of Catholic Schools:

   a. Written, signed request for VCEA certification;

   b. Official transcripts from an accredited college or university showing:

      1) Bachelor’s or Master’s Degree;
      2) Six (6) credits in Education
      3) Six (6) credits earned within the previous five (5) years;
      4) Technology Compliance Sheet signed by both teacher and principal.
      5) Virtus Training including documented compliance with diocesan child abuse prevention requirements
4. To apply for a VCEA certificate from the Diocese of Richmond, the following documents must either be submitted to or be on file with the Office of Catholic Schools:

   a. Written, signed request for VCEA certification
   b. Official transcripts from an accredited college or university showing an earned Bachelor’s or Masters Degree
   c. A copy of a completed application for State certification (Collegiate Professional or Post Graduate Professional)
   d. A copy of needed course work, specified by the State, for Professional Certification
   e. Technology compliance Sheet signed by both teacher and principal
   f. Documented compliance with diocesan child abuse prevention requirements

Personnel submitting the above documentation will be issued a “Provisional” VCEA certificate, valid for one year from issue. During the year of provisional certification, the following must be completed and applied toward State certification in order to obtain full VCEA certification:

   a. six (6) credit hours for those with a Bachelor’s degree or
   b. three (3) credit hours and 90 continuing education units (CEU’s) for those with a Master’s degree

Personnel must continue to work toward State Professional certification during the five year period that the VCEA certificate is valid.

The superintendent may, in special cases, grant VCEA certification status to long-time employees of the district. The superintendent will set requirements on a case-by-case basis.
A. STAFF-STUDENT RATIO FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

As of July 2005, the minimum staff-student ratio is one staff member to every eight children for age two, and one staff member for every ten children age three until age of eligibility to attend school. Each school should be responsible for compliance with Department of Social Services staff-student ratios. At least one staff member must be present with children at all times. Two staff members must be on the premises at all times when the program is in operation.

B. STAFF-STUDENT RATIO FOR EXTENDED DAY PROGRAMS

As of July 2005, the minimum staff-student ratio is two staff members to every eighteen through age eight and two staff members for every twenty for ages nine through 12. Each school should be responsible for compliance with local government staff-student ratios. At least one staff member must be present in each location within the program, for example inside and outdoors, in the homework room, and in the playroom, etc. Two staff members must be on the premises at all times when the program is in operation. Junior Assistants may be counted in the ratio—but may not be by themselves.

C. STAFF TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

All teaching staff must receive twenty hours of staff development each school year, appropriate to the duties assigned and the particular program. Teaching assistants (Aides) must receive ten hours of staff development. Staff development activities must:

- Be related to children and the function of the center;
- Consist of some sources outside the center which may include but not be limited to audio and visual tapes, conferences and workshops;
- Be from someone with verifiable expertise or experience when conducted as in-service training;
- Include annually the topics of safety for children, child development and discipline, and playground and outdoor supervision for staff;
- Include first aid and CPR training;
- Include working toward acquiring Religion certification (Catholic lead teachers only)
Visiting Team Membership

Representation must include:

A. For DFE (Arlington):
   - School administrators
   - Teachers
   - Persons with business/financial background
   - Persons qualified to review the religious dimension of the school (see Section A)
   - Chairperson

B. For DFG (Richmond):
   - Chairperson – Quality Assurance Board member
   - Two additional Quality Assurance Board members
   - School Improvement Chairperson from a school being evaluated the following year
   - Person with development/advancement background
   - Person with business/financial background

C. For Advance ED (Arlington)
   - Chairperson – SACS Approved
Design for Excellence/Design for Growth Guidelines for New Schools

Recommended guidelines for new Catholic schools who participate in the DFE/DFG processes are:

1. Effective July 1, 1999, all new diocesan schools affiliated with the Virginia Catholic Education Association will receive preliminary accreditation status when they have successfully met certain DFE/DFG standards as prescribed by VCEA Guidelines for New Schools.

2. The evaluation of new schools subscribing to the VCEA Minimum Standards will utilize the present DFE minimum standards instrument for the Arlington Diocese and the DFG for the Richmond Diocese. These instruments will, however, be modified to include a column which will indicate in which year each standard is expected to be achieved.
IV. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Safe Environment

A. Fingerprinting Requirements

The State Code of Virginia stipulates:

“As a condition of employment, the governing boards or administrators of private or parochial elementary or secondary schools which are accredited by a statewide accrediting organization recognized, prior to January 1, 1996, by the State Board of Education shall require all applicants who accept employment to submit to fingerprinting and to provide personal descriptive information to be forwarded along with the applicant's fingerprints through the Central Criminal Records Exchange to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the purpose of obtaining criminal history record information regarding such applicant. “

22.1-296.3

All accredited VCEA schools are expected to comply with this state requirement.

B. Virtus Training

All accredited VCEA schools are expected to comply with Virtus training requirements, which requires attendance at an educational program sponsored by the Diocese on methods of recognizing and preventing child abuse and sexual misconduct involving children and others.
Record Retention

Record Retention for Students Records
The following student records are to be retained indefinitely:
Permanent record card (to include attendance record and standardized test results)

The following student records are to be retained for 25 years:
IEP/ISP or 504 Plan
Student Assistance Plan
Eligibility Minutes
Student Assistance Team minutes

The following student records are to be retained for 7 years or age 25 whichever is greater:
Application
Counselor notes
Discipline notes
Court Documents
Psychological reports

Record Retention for Employee Records
The following employee records are to be retained for 7 years after leaving employment:
Application
References
Witness Statement
TB test documentation
Contract or letter of agreement
Certification (professional and religion)
Evaluations
Transcripts
Record of sick and vacation leave
Letter of resignation or termination
Disciplinary actions
Personnel Action Change Form

Each school should keep a list of personnel and positions for each year indefinitely.

The I-9 form must be retained for 1 year after leaving employment.
ARTICLE I: NAME AND PURPOSE

Section 1. The Virginia Catholic Educational Association (VCEA) is a private educational agency established under the auspices of the ordinaries of the Catholic Dioceses of Virginia from whom it derives its charter and by whom it is empowered to act in the schools within their areas of responsibility. This agency assists in the coordination of efforts among dioceses to maintain Catholic schools as a viable educational alternative.

Section 2. The purpose of the Association is to maintain and improve the quality of elementary and secondary Catholic education; to assist Catholic schools in the development of self-evaluative programs that foster educational excellence in the setting of a school faith community; to establish general standards for excellence in Catholic schools; to grant VCEA accreditation; to cooperate with the Virginia Council for Private Education (VCPE) in accrediting Catholic schools; and to provide a framework for improving communication and cooperation with all aspects of the educational community.

ARTICLE II: MEMBERSHIP

Members of the Association are the Catholic Dioceses of Virginia, preschool programs, and elementary schools and secondary schools operated under their auspices.

ARTICLE III: OFFICERS, COMMITTEES

Section 1. The Executive Committee shall consist of the Virginia Catholic Superintendents. The Chairperson of the Executive Committee shall be one of the diocesan Superintendents.

Section 2. The Accreditation Committee shall consist of: (1) one representative from each diocesan school office in Virginia, appointed by the diocesan Superintendent; (2) three school representatives (one high school and two elementary) from each diocese appointed by the diocesan Superintendent in consultation with the school principals; (3) the Accreditation Commissioner from each diocese; and (4) the Chairperson of the Executive Committee.

Section 3. Representatives from institutions of higher education and professional educational organizations may be invited to serve on the Accreditation Committee on an ad hoc basis by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee.
ARTICLE IV: DUTIES OF OFFICERS

The duties of the Chairperson shall be those of the chief administrative officer who shall be accountable to the Executive Committee for the operation of VCEA. The Chairperson shall be the official liaison between the VCEA and the VCPE and other state and regional accrediting agencies, act as Chairperson of the VCEA Accreditation Committee, appoint a secretary of the Committee, prepare the agenda for the meetings of the Committee, publish minutes of Committee meetings, publish an annual report to the members, provide appropriate educational information and statistics to VCPE.

ARTICLE V: DUTIES OF COMMITTEE

Section 1. The VCEA Executive Committee shall meet at least twice a year and may be called to meet at any other time by action of the Chairperson or at the request of any other Committee member.

Section 2. The Executive Committee shall:

(a) establish and promulgate general policy for the Association;

(b) provide for the coordination of its services in any activities appropriate to the purposes of VCEA;

(c) approve the criteria for evaluation used in the accreditation of member schools;

(d) grant certificates of accreditation;

(e) determine the amount of annual dues;

(f) approve an annual budget.

Section 3. The Accreditation Committee shall:

(a) review the criteria for evaluation used in the accreditation of member schools and offer appropriate revisions;

(b) review materials and take action on the recommendations of the visiting committees for VCEA/VCPE accreditation;

(c) hear appeals concerning the VCEA accreditation process;

(d) support projects related to the improvement of Catholic education;
(e) recommend policy to the Executive Committee;

(f) contingent upon a simple majority vote, submit Constitutional amendments to be voted on by the Executive Committee.

ARTICLE VI: DUTIES OF THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSIONER

Section 1. Each diocese shall appoint an accreditation commissioner who is the official diocesan coordinator of VCEA/VCPE accreditation within the diocese. The commissioner shall be a member of the diocesan office staff and has full authority to coordinate the VCEA/VCPE accreditation activities within the diocese.

Section 2. The accreditation commissioner has responsibility for the following areas:

(a) select the Visiting Team Chairperson/Member(s);

(b) approve team visitation dates

(c) provide in-service for team and school personnel;

(d) assist in instrument selection and self-study design;

(e) facilitate a systematic school follow-up process based on Visiting Team recommendation;

(f) serve as a member of the Accreditation Committee.

Section 3. Accreditation commissioners (who are not Superintendents) shall keep their Superintendents informed about major developments related to accreditation activities.

ARTICLE VII: TERMS OF OFFICE

Section 1. The office of Chairperson of the Executive Committee is one (1) year, renewable once.

Section 2. The term of office of the diocesan representatives on the Accreditation Committee is two (2) years, renewable at the discretion of the respective Superintendent.

Section 3. The term of office of the school representative on the Accreditation Committee is two (2) years, renewable once.

ARTICLE VIII: DUES
To meet the expenses of the Association, the Executive Committee shall determine the dues structure and amount.

**ARTICLE IX: AMENDMENTS**

A proposed amendment must be submitted at a duly authorized meeting of the Executive Committee and final action may not be taken unless notice of the proposed amendment has been mailed to all members of the Executive Committee at least one week before the meeting at which the amendment is to be submitted. A simple majority vote is necessary for adoption.

Approved: October 2007