SCL

SCL GUIDE TO
ACCREDITATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The launch of SCL accreditation represents the culmination of an extensive, thoughtful, prayerful, collaborative, and rigorous review process. SCL has provided support and resources for the classical Christian school movement for decades, offering extensive mentoring, coaching, and shared best practices for leaders, teachers, and boards. However, as the movement has grown, the need for both clarity and structure has also grown.

As SCL began to explore the possibility of accreditation, the organization hired a Director of Accreditation, worked with dozens of seasoned classical Christian educators, evaluated existing accreditation models, spoke with sister firms, and sought input from a broad range of leaders. Through extensive research and benchmarking, the SCL leadership team solicited feedback from hundreds of school leaders across all kinds of schools, models, and locations, and formed a council of scholars to help write, edit, define, and provide recommendations on our standards and indicators, school assessments, and the classical Christian distinctives of our approach. The result is a thoughtful, reflective, and mission-focused accreditation program developed by our team and the collective wisdom of many. Ultimately, it is a program we believe will help SCL grow the movement and ensure an enduring influence within classical Christian education.

PURPOSE

For schools to thrive, they must be able to apply classical Christian principles to every aspect of school life, from board governance to student discipleship. SCL's leadership recognizes four key advantages to delivering accreditation.

Quality Standard: Accreditation is the most effective means to establish a rigorous, prevailing quality standard for classical Christian schools. For SCL to advance classical Christian education, it is essential to recognize, actively draw upon, and reward quality.

School Improvement: One of SCL's fundamental commitments is to shepherd classical Christian schools through the stages of institutional development, from emerging to established to thriving. The SCL accreditation process strengthens member schools by providing a pathway to thriving.

Market Opportunity: Because SCL is not the only accrediting body for classical Christian schools, there is no pressure to accredit every institution. In the current landscape, SCL has an opportunity to position itself as the gold standard, not simply the accreditor of necessity. We seek to accredit mission-aligned schools that want to be in relationship with SCL.

Mission-Based: Through accreditation, SCL seeks to position hundreds of classical Christian schools to become thriving institutions, equipping them to fulfill their mission to form wise and virtuous men and women of God. By providing schools with a clear vision and means for thriving, SCL assists schools in making significant gains toward excellence.

ACCREDITATION OVERVIEW

Defining Classical Christian Education

To be a thriving school, leaders must first possess a clear understanding of classical Christian education and be able to articulate it to all constituents. SCL has adopted the following definition:
Classical Christian education aims to cultivate virtue and wisdom in students so they will live for the glory of God, flourishing as human beings and loving both God and neighbor. It pursues these goals through an ordered exploration of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful that is grounded in the liberal arts tradition and that forms students' affections and the habits of lifelong learning.

Defining Thriving Schools

In addition to defining classical Christian education, a robust framework for what a thriving classical Christian school embodies is also important. Schools must be aware of how their mission translates to the daily operations, culture, and academic life of the community. Therefore, in order to assist schools in this important work, SCL developed eight standards, each with ten indicators, that are principled and thorough. See Appendix A for a list of SCL standards and indicators.

THE SCL APPROACH

Our accreditation process is guided by our core values of being joyfully bound to Christ, boldly expanding the classical tradition, and faithfully extending hospitality. These values help shape a Principled, Aspirational, Thorough, and Hospitable (PATH) approach to helping schools thrive.

Principled

SCL employs a principled rather than prescriptive approach. To provide a clear guide and measure for schools, SCL's eight standards and ten accompanying indicators capture the essence of a thriving classical Christian school. We work together with schools before, during, and after the visit to evaluate these principles within the context of your school. Our goal is to put schools on the path to thriving—helping them fulfill their mission to their families and communities.

Aspirational

Much like a portrait of a graduate, the SCL standards and indicators are idealistic. While each candidate school is assessed against the SCL standards and indicators to foster improvement, our accreditation team is there to observe and offer feedback, not to shame or make schools jump through arbitrary hoops, reductionistic lists, or tedious prescribed changes. Structuring accreditation in this way allows the team to spend time focused on targeting aspirational areas for improvement.

Thorough

Shortly after the visit, you will receive a comprehensive PATHway to Thriving Report with our findings regarding each of the eight standards through the lens of all 80 indicators. The report is lengthy (25-30 pages), including both qualitative and quantitative data that highlights areas of strength and identifies key areas for growth. Additionally, a list of recommended resources is included.

Hospitable

Hospitality, a core value of SCL, is interwoven throughout the accreditation process. We work with schools, not merely to assess, but to support and resource them as they seek improvement. Our process requires high levels of active engagement from each school's executive leadership team, both during the assessment process and in executing the improvement. At the same time, SCL is here to support the school's leadership team before, during, and after the visit. Accreditation does not need to be a miserable experience.

THE TEAM

A distinctive feature of the SCL accreditation process is the intentional composition of the accreditation team with experienced educators carefully selected based on their demonstrated expertise in at least two of the eight standards as well as their understanding of the candidate school's model. Teams consist of four to five leaders, one of whom works for SCL. At least one team member will be a current head of school. Other team members may include former school heads, board members, and/or senior executive team members of classical Christian schools who possess the leadership qualities and experience to provide excellent insight during the accreditation process.

THE STEPS

SCL's accreditation process includes three phases (with each phase being described in detail later in this document):

01

Preparation

–   Build a relationship with SCL through membership and engagement in events and offerings
–   Submit an inquiry and take part in a pre-screen interview
–   Complete application
–   Review standards and Indicators using playbooks

02

Candidacy

–   Host campus visit
–   Receive post-visit PATHway to Thriving Report

03

Improvement Years

–   Take part in annual follow-up meetings with SCL
–   Implement a plan for improvement
–   Utilize SCL PATHway services

THE METHODOLOGY

To assess the standards and indicators, accreditation teams disseminate surveys, review submitted materials, and conduct focus group interviews. All interviews use carefully developed interview protocols. Additionally, the accreditation team observes classroom instruction and school liturgies and rituals. School facilities, where teaching and learning occur, are also considered. Teams carefully review and analyze the data collected from each of these methods to assess the school in light of the standards and indicators, rating each standard as emerging, established, or thriving. The collection of this data allows SCL to support the individual school towards improvement while simultaneously contributing to a growing body of key insights about the movement writ large.

THE RESOURCES

Our goal through accreditation is to create a path to thriving by providing targeted feedback and resources. At the conclusion of the site visit, the team provides the school with a comprehensive PATHway to Thriving Report. This lengthy (25-30 pages) report includes observations and recommendations regarding the standards and indicators. The report also includes a consultant's corner where team members may provide additional individualized and tailored feedback that may not fall neatly under our standards and indicators. The PATHway to Thriving Report describes strengths and areas of improvement for each standard. Additionally, PATHway services—targeted resources (consulting, cohorts, workshops, etc.)—are recommended, and a path toward thriving is provided for areas designated as emerging or established.

STATE RECOGNITION

In May of 2024, SCL entered into a cooperative agreement with Middle States Association (MSA). The partnership allows schools to be accredited by both organizations by utilizing the full SCL process as described in this guide along with a streamlined MSA process (varies by state). Schools that desire MSA accreditation will need to register through the MSA website and pay a separate membership fee to MSA. Dual Accreditation from MSA will be of more value in some states than others, depending on state-level oversight of private schools and particular wording of school choice law. In some instances, MSA may ask for documents that SCL does not require, however, SCL and MSA work in tandem when a school chooses to pursue dual accreditation.

PROFILE OF CANDIDATE SCHOOL

A school ready to seek accreditation through SCL has thought deeply about what it means to be a classical Christian school and has aligned its practices with its own mission. Additionally, the school is committed to the mission, vision, and values of the Society for Classical Learning and desires to pursue a long-term partnership with SCL. Schools interested in accreditation should be members of SCL for a minimum of one year before applying for accreditation (exceptions to the one year requirement may be made on a case-by-case basis) and engage with SCL through events, training, etc. All candidacy criteria listed below must be in place before beginning the accreditation process.

01 Grounded in historic Christian faith as expressed in the Nicene and Apostles' creeds

02 Committed to cultivating wisdom and virtue in students through the Great Tradition of classical Christian education

03 Operates under a functioning board with at least three board members

04 Has corporate bylaws, articles of incorporation, and an organizational structure that differentiates between governance functions and day-to-day management

05 Has a head of school who is not the chair of the governing body

06 Operates under non-discriminatory admissions and employment policies in accordance with state and federal law

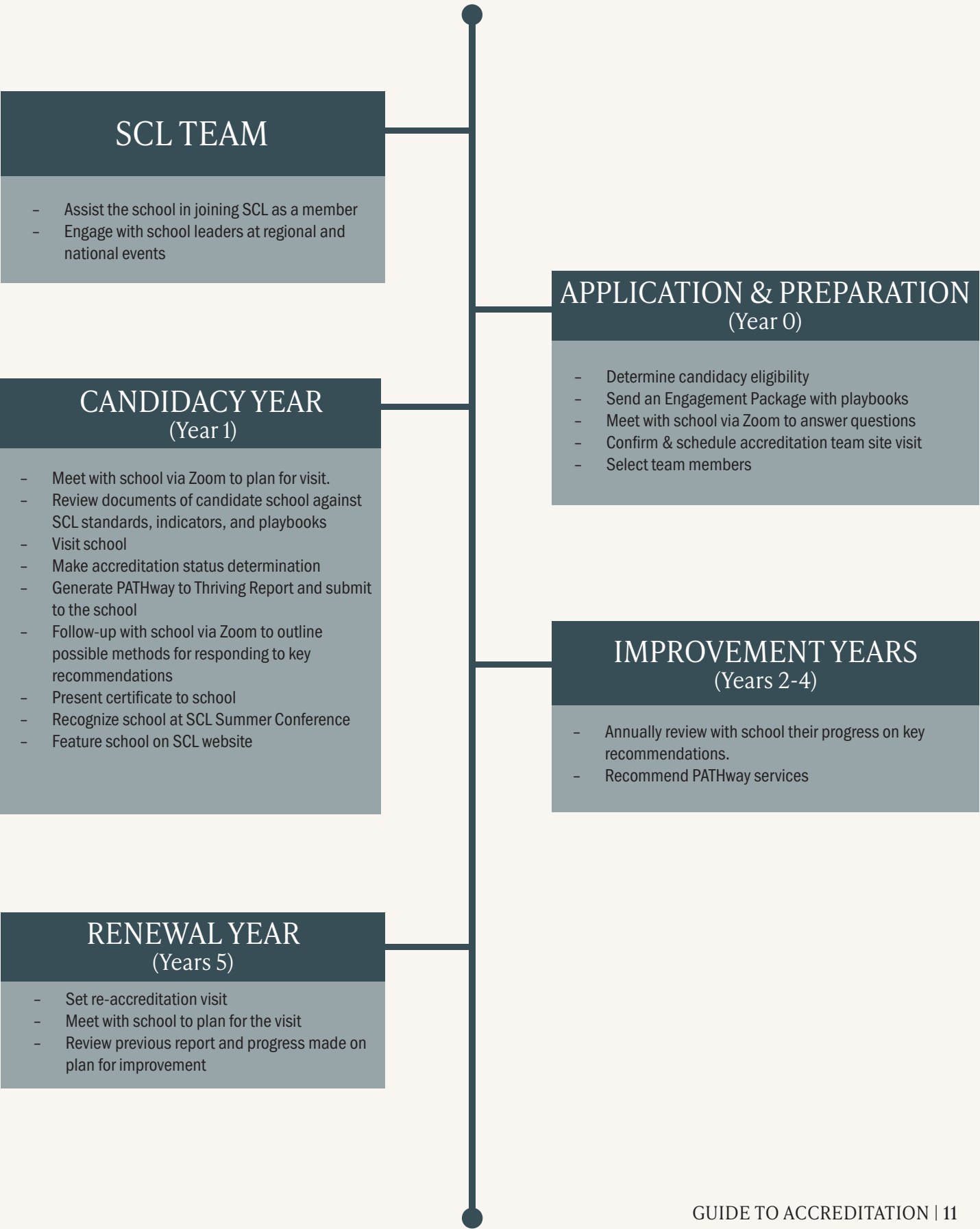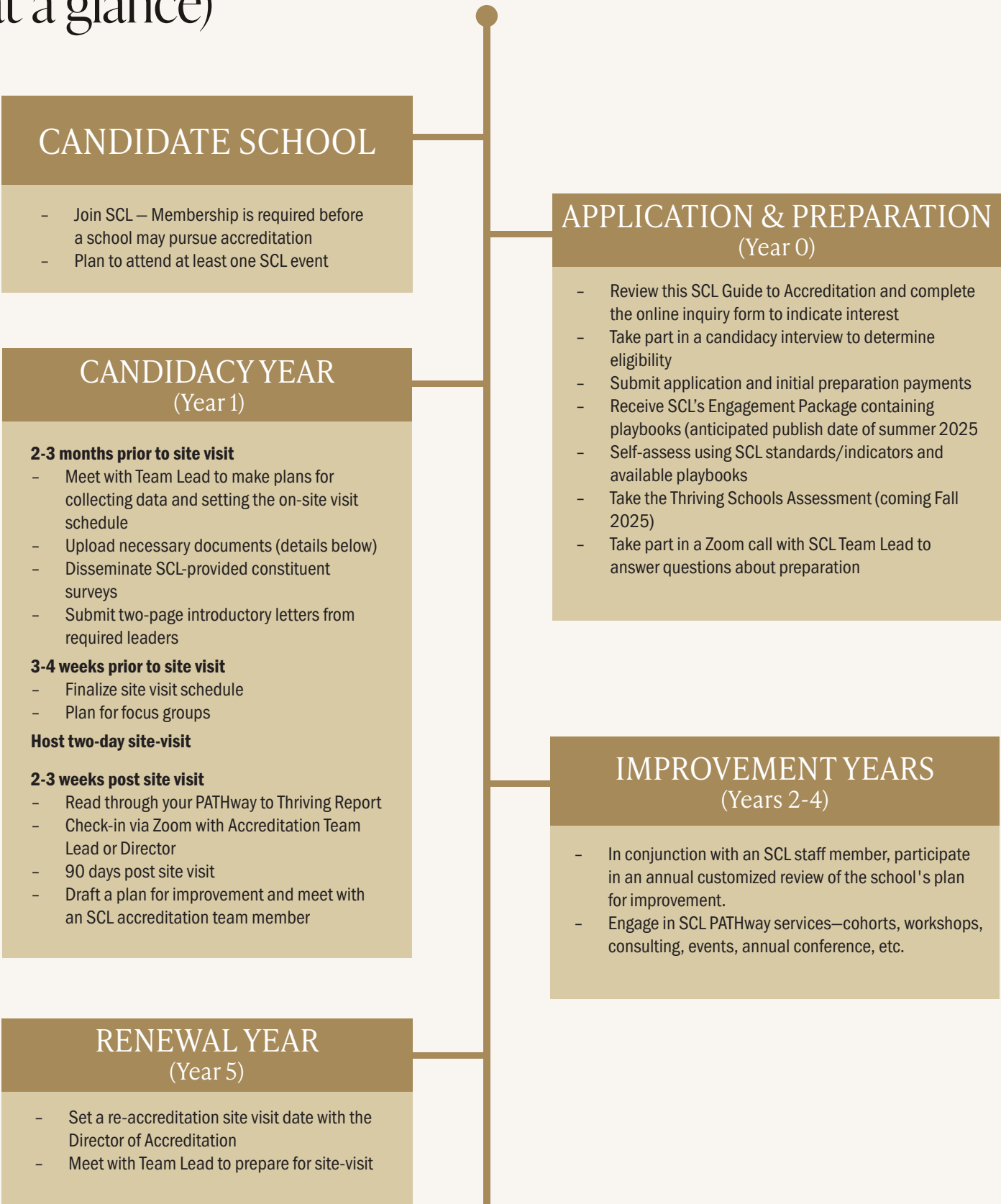**07** Is financially sustainable and has a financial model or business plan

08 Has reviewed the standards and indicators and feels confident that they are ready to be evaluated based on these criteria

ACCREDITATION PROCESS
(at a glance)

CANDIDATE SCHOOL

- Join SCL — Membership is required before a school may pursue accreditation
- Plan to attend at least one SCL event

CANDIDACY YEAR
(Year 1)

2-3 months prior to site visit
- Meet with Team Lead to make plans for collecting data and setting the on-site visit schedule
- Upload necessary documents (details below)
- Disseminate SCL-provided constituent surveys
- Submit two-page introductory letters from required leaders

3-4 weeks prior to site visit
- Finalize site visit schedule
- Plan for focus groups

Host two-day site-visit

2-3 weeks post site visit
- Read through your PATHway to Thriving Report
- Check-in via Zoom with Accreditation Team Lead or Director
- 90 days post site visit
- Draft a plan for improvement and meet with an SCL accreditation team member

RENEWAL YEAR
(Year 5)

- Set a re-accreditation site visit date with the Director of Accreditation
- Meet with Team Lead to prepare for site-visit

APPLICATION & PREPARATION
(Year 0)

- Review this SCL Guide to Accreditation and complete the online inquiry form to indicate interest
- Take part in a candidacy interview to determine eligibility
- Submit application and initial preparation payments
- Receive SCL's Engagement Package containing playbooks (anticipated publish date of summer 2025)
- Self-assess using SCL standards/indicators and available playbooks
- Take the Thriving Schools Assessment (coming Fall 2025)
- Take part in a Zoom call with SCL Team Lead to answer questions about preparation

IMPROVEMENT YEARS
(Years 2-4)

- In conjunction with an SCL staff member, participate in an annual customized review of the school's plan for improvement.
- Engage in SCL PATHway services—cohorts, workshops, consulting, events, annual conference, etc.

SCL TEAM

- Assist the school in joining SCL as a member
- Engage with school leaders at regional and national events

CANDIDACY YEAR
(Year 1)

- Meet with school via Zoom to plan for visit.
- Review documents of candidate school against SCL standards, indicators, and playbooks
- Visit school
- Make accreditation status determination
- Generate PATHway to Thriving Report and submit to the school
- Follow-up with school via Zoom to outline possible methods for responding to key recommendations
- Present certificate to school
- Recognize school at SCL Summer Conference
- Feature school on SCL website

APPLICATION & PREPARATION
(Year 0)

- Determine candidacy eligibility
- Send an Engagement Package with playbooks
- Meet with school via Zoom to answer questions
- Confirm & schedule accreditation team site visit
- Select team members

IMPROVEMENT YEARS
(Years 2-4)

- Annually review with school their progress on key recommendations.
- Recommend PATHway services

RENEWAL YEAR
(Years 5)

- Set re-accreditation visit
- Meet with school to plan for the visit
- Review previous report and progress made on plan for improvement

ACCREDITATION PROCESS
(a detailed look)

PRE-SCREENING

Inquiry

Complete the online inquiry form through the SCL website and take part in a candidacy interview (via phone or video conference) to determine eligibility for accreditation. If accreditation is not recommended at this time, the following options may be suggested for the school:

– Additional time to allow the school to prepare
– Specific SCL services such as cohorts, workshops, regional events
– Consulting services

APPLICATION YEAR

Once candidacy criteria have been met, the following tasks are expected:

01 **Application**

– Complete application
– Pay accreditation application fee as well as the preparation and site visit fee
– Proceed with the steps outlined in the timeline above

02 **Self-Assessment Using SCL Playbooks**

Once the application is submitted and fees are paid, SCL will send the school an engagement package that includes SCL playbooks (one per standard). For suggestions on how to use the playbooks, see Appendix B. This step is key to ensuring a successful visit that provides the most benefit to the school.

03

Necessary Documents and Data

FOUNDING DOCUMENTS

Articles of incorporation/certificate of organization/charter

Bylaws

501c3 (if non-profit)

Mission/vision/values statements (including statements of faith)

Portrait of a Graduate

School Profile

Strategic Plan

Master Campus Plan

FINANCE

Strategic financial plan

Financial statements (e.g., P&L/Income Statement, Balance Sheet, Cash Flow)
   ideally audited or reviewed by an outside CPA. Please provide both the last
   fiscal year's financials as well as the current year-to-date financials.

Most recent Form 990
   (annually filed with the IRS by nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations)

Annual Budget
   noting whether it is prepared on a cash- or accrual basis.

LEADERSHIP

Organizational chart

List of head of school's direct reports

Board manual

Minutes from the last four board meetings

Administrative playbooks
(or a document that guides executive team meetings, if available)

Faculty handbook

Faculty evaluation plan/documents

Student handbook

A sample of parent communication from the last year

ACADEMICS

Academic calendar

Curriculum Map and/or Scope & Sequence

Course Syllabi (samples from various grade levels)

Sample lesson plans from all school levels

Weekly schedule

Professional development plan

04 Constituent Surveys

SCL provides surveys for the following constituents. Links for these surveys will be provided by your SCL Team Lead. These must be completed at least two weeks prior to the site visit.

– Board of Trustees
– Finance and Enrollment Management data
– Parents
– Faculty
– Administrators other than the Head of School
– Introductory Letters

05 Introductory Letters

The following people are each asked to submit a two-page letter sharing the vision, strengths, and challenges of the school at this moment—think state-of-the-school address. These must be completed at least two weeks prior to the site visit.

– Head of School
– Board Chair
– Leader of each division—Upper School Head, Lower School Head, Dean of Academics, Dean of Students, Dean of Faculty, Director of Fine arts, and the Athletic Director

06 Prepare for Visit

Invite constituents to specific focus groups (see lists below)
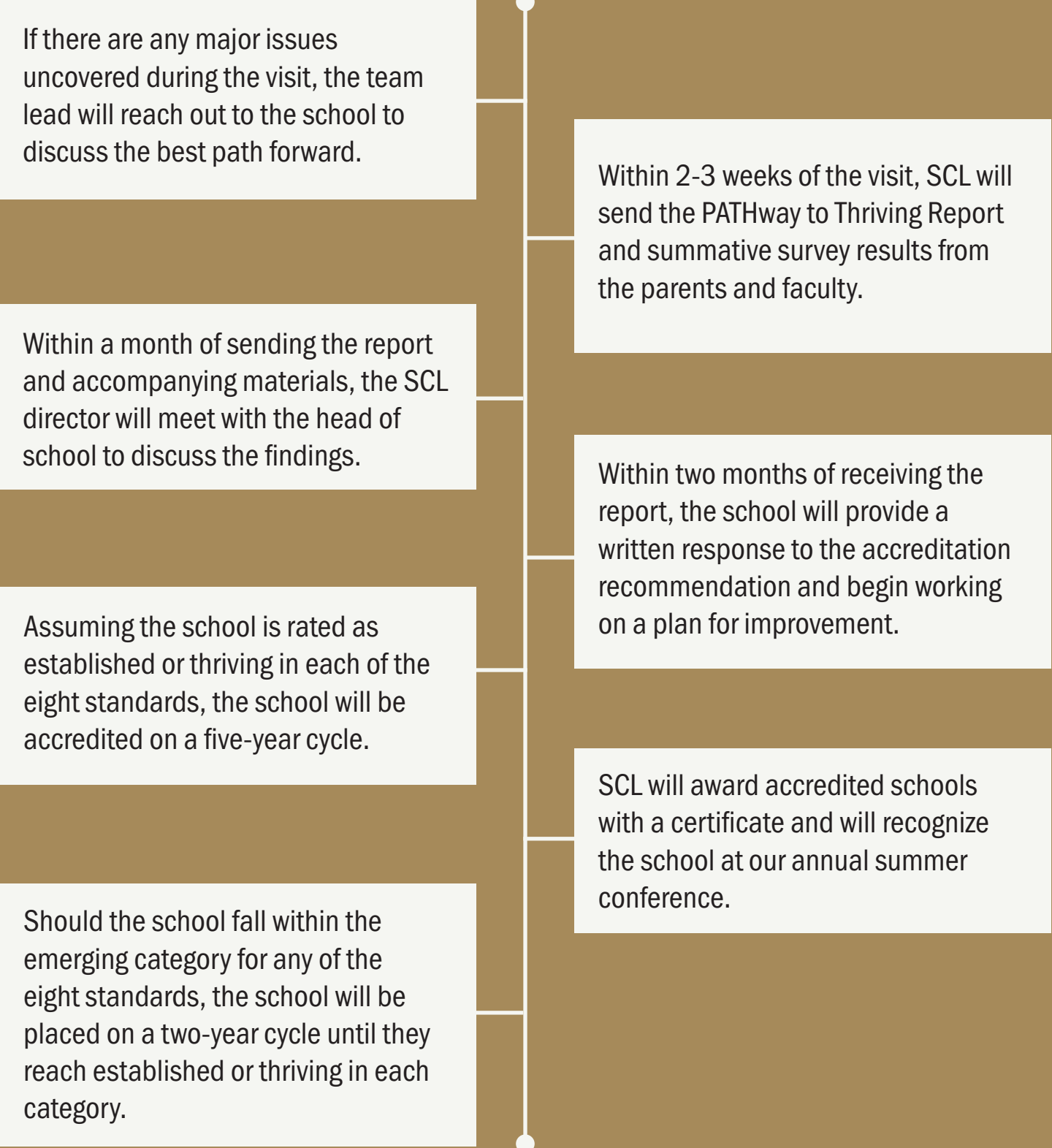Prepare the on-site schedule using the sample in Appendix C

CANDIDACY YEAR

The time spent on campus is focused on observations and interviews. The intent is to gather as much data as possible related to the school's adherence to the standards and indicators. Recognizing that some of these categories may look different in each school, the accreditation team lead will work with the school coordinator to finalize the schedule at least two weeks prior to the visit.

SITE VISIT

Tour
    Campus/Admissions tour (from a prospective parent perspective)

Focus Groups (5-7 people per group, 60 min for adults/45 min for children)
    B-ring administrators (anyone who reports directly to the head of school)
    Board of Trustees
    Lower school faculty
    Upper school faculty
    Academic leaders (may also be B-ring administrators)
    Advancement team (communications, enrollment, and development)
    Operations and finance
    Lower school students (grades 4-6)
    Upper school students (grades 7-12)
    Lower school parents
    Upper school parents

Interviews
    Head of School
    Board chair
    Others as needed

Observations
    Chapel
    Classroom instruction (not every classroom will be observed)
    Faculty meeting (if possible)

POST VISIT

If there are any major issues uncovered during the visit, the team lead will reach out to the school to discuss the best path forward.

Within 2-3 weeks of the visit, SCL will send the PATHway to Thriving Report and summative survey results from the parents and faculty.

Within a month of sending the report and accompanying materials, the SCL director will meet with the head of school to discuss the findings.

Within two months of receiving the report, the school will provide a written response to the accreditation recommendation and begin working on a plan for improvement.

Assuming the school is rated as established or thriving in each of the eight standards, the school will be accredited on a five-year cycle.

SCL will award accredited schools with a certificate and will recognize the school at our annual summer conference.

Should the school fall within the emerging category for any of the eight standards, the school will be placed on a two-year cycle until they reach established or thriving in each category.

IMPROVEMENT YEARS

SCL deeply values the partnership with the school. We don't simply visit and then see you again in five years. From the point of inquiry and the site visit all the way through the improvement years and to the next point of re-accreditation, we are engaged with you and supporting you along the way. We are here to help you thrive. As such, SCL will annually meet with the school to review progress on key recommendations from the visit. Additionally, SCL will provide PATHway service recommendations—online cohorts/workshops/seminars, specific events, resources, and consulting—that support the school in identified areas of growth.

POST ACCREDITATION EXPECTATIONS

01 Remain engaged through participation in the PATHways services as noted above. During the improvement years, SCL offers a generous 40% discount on offerings and regional events.

02 Notify SCL, in a timely manner, of any substantial changes in the school, including a change in head of school, adding or contracting grade levels, mission change, name change, merger, crisis, litigation, insolvency, possibility of school closure, etc. In the event of a substantial change, SCL may contact the school for more information and to offer support.

03 Keep current with all membership and accreditation obligations with SCL and remain in compliance with SCL's standards. Failure to do so will result in the removal of SCL accredited school designation.

FAQ's

Does SCL accreditation mean we qualify for school choice funding?

Maybe. The requirements vary from state to state and SCL is happy to work with you to make sure that a successful accreditation visit leads to the recognition needed according to local rules and regulations. SCL/ MSA dual accreditation may be required for a school to receive choice funds in some instances.

What is the accreditation cycle?

Schools found to be established or thriving for each of the eight standards and who have submitted a valid plan for improvement will be placed on a five-year cycle. Schools deemed to be emerging in any one category may be placed on a two-year cycle until they reach established or thriving status in each category.

Is it possible for a school to fail accreditation?

Our desire is to partner effectively with the school from the first inquiry to the final report in order to ensure a successful outcome. Ideally, the candidacy interview will reveal obstacles to a successful accreditation process. In such a case, a recommendation will be made to postpone accreditation until the concerns are overcome. In rare cases, the SCL accreditation team may uncover, during the site visit, major risks to the school that preclude SCL from accrediting the school until certain contingencies are met.

What does accreditation through SCL get us?

SCL accreditation provides you an opportunity to compare your school to SCL's thriving school standards that are anchored in best practices for mission support and delivery. Carefully selected team members evaluate your school against these standards and provide you with a comprehensive report. But that's just the beginning. SCL continues to walk with you through the years following your visit, to support you in accomplishing goals identified through the accreditation process. Resources unique to SCL, such as playbooks, PATHway services, and consulting, ensure that your school has all the resources and support it needs to become a thriving institution. Other benefits vary from state to state and can be discussed in the pre-screening process. Additionally, dual accreditation through Middle States Accreditation (MSA) will provide schools with state level recognition in places where that is needed.

How do I pursue dual accreditation with MSA?

If interested in dual accreditation, please let SCL know when completing the accreditation application. See the State Recognition section of this guide for more details regarding our cooperative agreement with Middle States Accreditation. In short, you will need to register with MSA and indicate that you are seeking dual accreditation with SCL. Once MSA verifies your candidacy status, we will contact both you and MSA to verify the path forward. The exact process varies by state, but SCL will walk with you through this process to make it as seamless as possible.

Is the accreditation process different for collaborative (aka hybrid or University-Model®) schools?

The accreditation process is the same for traditional five-day and collaborative schools; however, to be considered for accreditation, SCL will expect the collaborative (aka hybrid or University-Model®) school to meet the following criteria that differentiates the school from a co-op.

1. Collaborative schools provide the equivalent of five days of academic programs via a unique model that alternates instruction between the on-campus classroom and the home, thus sharing instruction between classroom teachers and parents. Students spend, on average, a minimum of 14-hours per week on campus.
2. The school takes the academic lead by selecting curriculum, designating a scope and sequence, providing lesson plans for home days, and providing assessment of the student's learning.
3. The school is a diploma-granting institution with a list of courses and credits required for each grade level for full-time students. While some a la carte courses may be offered to part-time students, the majority of students should be full-time as the school's mission is to provide a comprehensive academic plan as evidenced by a well-designed and articulated diploma plan.
4. The school hires professional instructors for all on-campus classes and follows a well-developed professional development plan for all faculty and staff.
5. Through a partnership with the school, parents agree to follow the academic lead of the school, holding their children accountable for the completion of the academic program set forth by the school.
6. As an integral part of the partnership between the school and the home, the school commits to regular and thorough training of parents to support and equip them for their appropriate role, according to the grade level. Parent roles may vary from co-instructor to tutor to guide to coach.
7. Given the unique needs of this collaborative model, the school provides adequate administrative support to faculty and families.

APPENDIX A

Standards & Indicators
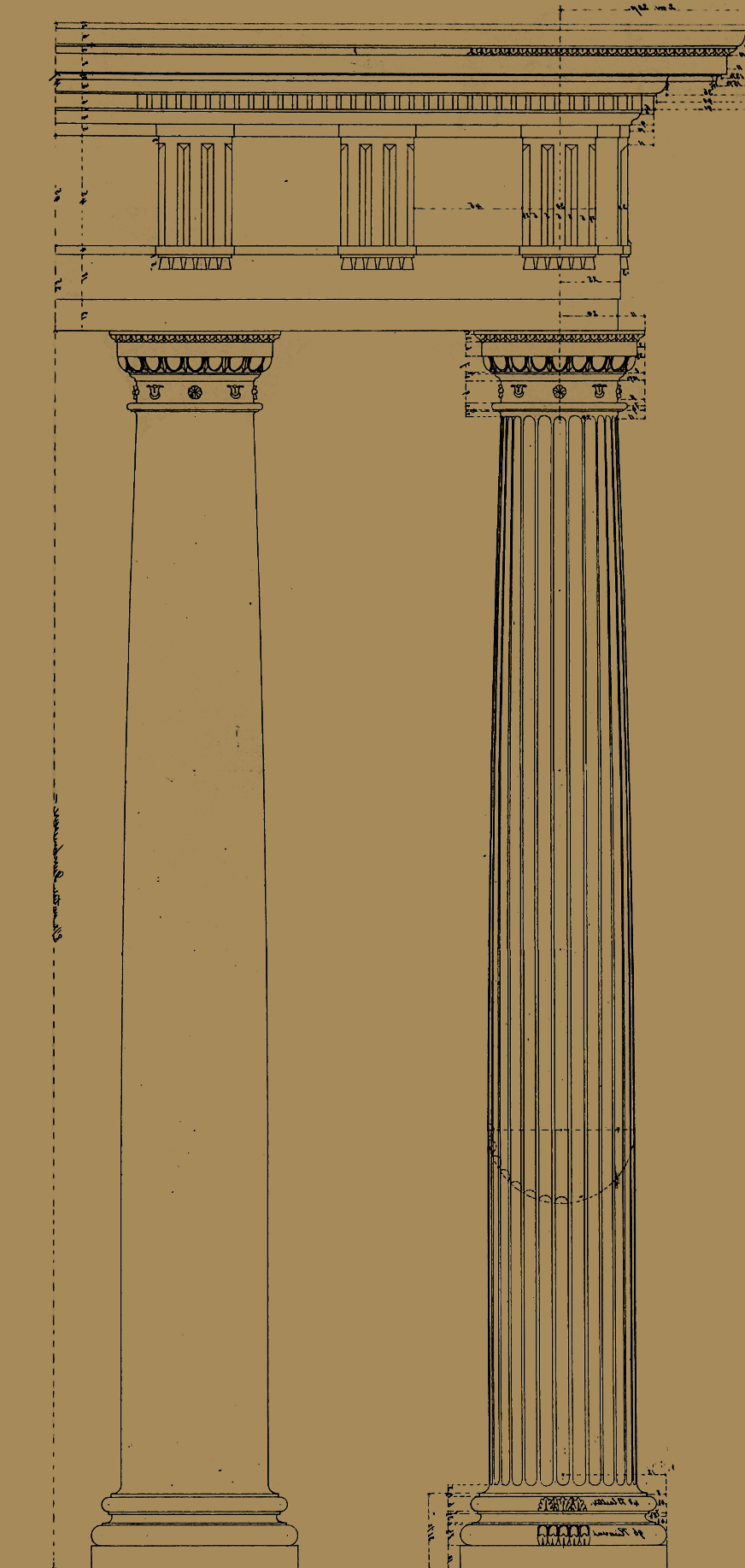
Standards:

1. Christian Commitment
2. Classical Commitment
3. School Culture
4. Student Experience
5. Governance
6. Executive Leadership
7. Finances & Facilities
8. Advancement

STANDARD 1: CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

Classical Christian schools align their educational philosophy and policies with their Christian commitments and intentionally embody those commitments in practices.

Thriving Classical Christian Schools:

1. Define their Christian identity in a manner consistent with historic Christian orthodoxy as articulated by the Nicene Creed.
2. Articulate their Christian commitments explicitly in their mission statement and foundational documents.
3. Regularly and clearly articulate their Christian identity to all constituencies.
4. Require all leadership, faculty, and staff to affirm the school's Christian commitments and to be in active communion and participation with a local Christian church.
5. Engage regularly as a community in historic Christian practices such as prayer, singing, and the reading of Scripture.
6. Have policies and practices that reflect a biblical understanding of human nature.
7. Foster unity by speaking the truth in love and resolve conflict in accordance with biblical principles.
8. Require explicit biblical/theological instruction and view all curricular subjects as an integrated whole given that God is the source of all truth.
9. Include the understanding and embodiment of the school's Christian commitments as a key part of professional development and evaluation.
10. Frame student expectations and discipline in terms of Christian discipleship and spiritual formation.

STANDARD 2 CLASSICAL COMMITMENT

Classical Christian schools manifest the liberal arts tradition by their philosophy of education and harmonized educational practices.

Thriving Classical Christian Schools:

1. Understand and articulate the purpose of education as forming students according to reality, manifest in truth, goodness, and beauty, embodied in Christ.
2. Understand and articulate a student's need for learning in terms of restoring the broken image of God in students by cultivating knowledge, virtue, and wisdom.
3. Train students according to their nature, which is a fusion of body and soul, with soul being composed of mind, will, and affections.
4. Follow the liberal arts tradition to develop and document a curriculum; the full paradigm consists of piety, gymnastic and music; the seven mathematical and verbal arts, including classical languages; fine arts; common arts; natural, moral, and divine philosophy; and theology.
5. Understand that classical teaching is fundamentally apprenticeship: teachers model the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and virtue; the exercise of skill in the liberal arts; and the deep and radiant love of learning–while giving constant attention to the skills, habits, beliefs, and loves of their students.
6. Avoid the error of reducing the practice of teaching to disseminating information or covering content, but rather engage students in two basic modes of teaching— didactic and dialectic.
7. Provide thoughtful and well-prepared lessons, unhurried instruction, and frequent assessments that prioritize skills, shape the imagination, and dignify the child.
8. Give curricular priority to living books, classic texts, and great works of art within the Christian tradition over informational texts, popular art, or contemporary textbooks.
9. Develop and regularly revise a written scope and sequence that deliberately orders and integrates courses vertically and horizontally across grades and curricular areas.
10. Intentionally align schoolwide policies and procedures to the school's mission of delivering the classical Christian model of education.

STANDARD 3
SCHOOL CULTURE

Classical Christian schools align their educational philosophy and policies with their Christian commitments and intentionally embody those commitments in practices.

Thriving Classical Christian Schools:

1. Prudently order the use of space, time, and language in ways that reflect the mission of the school.
2. Clearly articulate missionally aligned standards of behavior and decorum for faculty, staff, students, and parents and hold accountable those who do not act in accordance with those standards.
3. Deliberately protect time and space for regular faculty fellowship and collaboration.
4. Intentionally promote and support formal and informal professional development for faculty.
5. Prioritize sustainable faculty workloads that facilitate leisure.
6. Implement faculty hiring, development, and evaluation programs that attract, grow, and retain excellent faculty and staff.
7. Encourage discipling and mentoring relationships between teachers and students.
8. Design programs and practices to intentionally cultivate Christ-centered community.
9. Actively engage parents as members of the school learning community through ongoing parent education and parental involvement in school activities.
10. Honor the role of the school and school activities within the broader context of family, church, and community.

STANDARD 4
STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Classical Christian schools have students whose daily experience reflects the classical and Christian commitments of the school.

Thriving Classical Christian Schools Students:

1. Enjoy a schedule and workload that facilitates human flourishing.
2. Experience consistency of mission and values across all aspects of school programming.
3. Demonstrate joy and a love of learning both in and outside the classrooms.
4. Experience high expectations, high accountability, and high levels of support.
5. Demonstrate age-appropriate intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth.
6. Develop healthy relationships with peers as well as students across other grade levels.
7. Demonstrate a love of God and love of neighbor.
8. Embrace a vision of the good life defined by God-given human purpose and calling.
9. Demonstrate a knowledge of and appreciation for the school's values.
10. Benefit from an alignment between the school's articulated values and their daily experience.

STANDARD 5
GOVERNANCE

Classical Christian schools exercise a disciplined governance model of leadership that focuses on long-term viability.

Thriving Classical Christian Schools' Boards:

1. Understand that the fundamental purpose of the board is to guard the mission and vision of the school for future generations.
2. Have governance policies and practices that demonstrate a clear understanding of the board's appropriate role.
3. Have an effective board chair who invests in understanding the purpose and practices of healthy board governance, leads the board, and develops a productive and supportive relationship with the head of school.
4. Maintain a healthy balance of fiduciary, strategic, and generative modes of governance.
5. Wisely evaluate and perpetuate themselves.
6. Are disciplined and strategically focused in all of their work.
7. Ensure compliance in policies and practices with all pertinent local, state, and federal laws.
8. Secure, equip, support, and hold accountable the head of school as their sole employee through a collaborative relationship characterized by a high level of trust.
9. Have board members who relate to one another and the broader school community in accordance with the school's values and culture.
10. Require board members to engage in ongoing education regarding classical Christian education and board best practices.

STANDARD 6
EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

Classical Christian schools ensure that the executive leaders of the school possess the character, competence, and capacity to fulfill their roles.

Thriving Classical Christian Schools' Executive Leaders:

1. Form a cohesive leadership team characterized by clarity, trust, predictability, and accountability.
2. Model the classical and Christian ideals of the school in word and deed.
3. Implement strategic priorities defined by the school's planning documents.
4. Demonstrate intentional practices that lead to flourishing parent partnerships.
5. Ensure that day-to-day practices, routines, and rituals maximize missional student formation.
6. Effectively recruit, lead, develop, and retain capable and mission-aligned faculty and staff.
7. Identify and invest in future leaders.
8. Work effectively with the Board.
9. Advance the mission, vision, and distinctives of the school with clarity and conviction.
10. Steward resources to ensure alignment with the school's strategic plan and sound financial management principles.

STANDARD 7
FINANCES & FACILITIES

Classical Christian schools practice fiscal responsibility and align all their resources to serve the mission of the school.

Thriving Classical Christian Schools:

1. Employ a multi-year financial plan that realistically anticipates operating costs, conservatively estimates future enrollment, and includes all items in the school's strategic plan.
2. Have an informed and reliable tuition model that consistently provides for the needs of the school and prioritizes the strategic goals of the school.
3. Offer compensation packages that are designed to recruit, retain, and develop high-quality, mission-fit personnel.
4. Build and maintain healthy cash reserves to ensure financial sustainability.
5. Have a board that provides appropriate oversight and leadership to secure the financial future of the school. Have written safety policies and procedures that are sound, clear, and consistently implemented.
6. Have written safety policies and procedures that are sound, clear, and consistently implemented.
7. Show evidence of sound risk management policies and procedures.
8. Have a master campus plan that aligns with the school's mission, philosophy, and aesthetic and which accommodates the school's terminal size.
9. Prioritize and invest in the beauty of their campus.
10. Create and manage their facilities responsibly to facilitate student flourishing.

STANDARD 8
ADVANCEMENT

Classical Christian schools advance their mission by strategically cultivating meaningful relationships across all constituencies through a unified and integrated advancement approach. (enrollment, development, marketing communication, community engagement)

Thriving Classical Christian Schools:

1. Operate with a strategic board as the foundation of all advancement efforts—establishing the school's strategic and financial vision, modeling generosity, and cultivating new relationships, while providing non-operational oversight.
2. Define and maintain a strong institutional brand by understanding the market and consistently articulating the school's mission through visual identity, messaging, and storytelling.
3. Implement transparent, mission-driven communication practices that keep faculty, staff, students, and families informed, engaged, and aligned.
4. Leverage media channels and community engagement to effectively communicate mission and impact to prospective families and stakeholders.
5. Foster consistent, meaningful, hospitality-driven engagement with parents, alumni, donors, students, and faculty, ensuring they feel valued as partners.
6. Regularly solicit, track, analyze, act on, and respond to feedback from constituents.
7. Develop principled admissions policies and practices to attract, vet, and onboard mission-aligned students and families.
8. Manage enrollment strategically by leveraging demographic data and constituent feedback to assess trends, retention rates, and program effectiveness while working to retain, vet, and support mission-fit families.
9. Establish a culture of generosity through a sustainable approach to fundraising that encourages all constituents to support the school's mission through giving.
10. Create and implement a comprehensive development plan that cultivates meaningful relationships and secures the resources required by the strategic financial plan.

APPENDIX B
How to Use Playbooks

The SCL accreditation process is designed to be aspirational in nature while also providing guidance. In the same way, playbooks are not intended to serve as an "operators manual" but rather as a "guide or handbook." These resources were developed by dedicated leaders with deep experience leading schools over the past few decades. While the practices presented in these books have proven to be effective towards our telos of wisdom and virtue cultivation in the lives of students, we understand that they must also be applied in your particular setting. Playbooks are not intended to be used in an overly prescriptive way. Every school leadership team must evaluate their particular context and make prudent decisions. Below are guidelines to consider for making the most of the SCL playbooks.

First, familiarize yourself with the playbook. Each of our eight playbooks (one per standard) begins with a philosophy and principles section that narratively explains the standard and its foundational principles. This is followed by generative questions designed to spark discussion and inquiry, along with a glossary to aid understanding. The core of each playbook dives deeply into the indicators, offering a rationale, diagnostic questions, and examples of documents or actions that demonstrate successful implementation. Best practices are highlighted, as well as common pitfalls and red flags to avoid. Each playbook concludes with a comprehensive list of references and resources to further enhance understanding and application of the standard.

SCL recommends that the school consider using these in **phase 1**—the pre-accreditation months. This precursory "work" for the site visit is not required as a part of our accreditation process, but it should prove invaluable in getting the most out of the process. Our suggestion for studying the playbooks is simply to 1) provide you and your team with a deeper understanding of the standards and indicators by which your school will be evaluated and 2) allow you a headstart on self-identifying your school's strengths and areas for improvement. For example, one head of school shared with us that he uses Playbook VI—Executive Leadership at his weekly executive team meetings, examining one indicator at each meeting. His board follows the same practice at their meetings using Playbook V—Governance.

The playbooks are also an instrumental part of **phase 2**—the accreditation visit. Members of the SCL accreditation team are carefully selected based on their leadership experience and their knowledge of particular standards. Each member is assigned two standards to assess by leading focus groups, observing classes, and reviewing the supporting documents. In particular, team members will use the playbook Evidence of Implementation section and Pitfalls and Red Flags section to determine if your school is emerging, established, or thriving in that particular standard.

In **phase 3**—following the site visit, our SCL accreditation team will send you a thorough narrative, called the PATHway to Thriving Report, that identifies areas of strength and areas for improvement based on the eight standards for thriving schools. SCL's Director of Leadership Development will review the PATHway to Thriving Report with you and assist you in utilizing these playbooks through the improvement years following the site visit. The Director may also suggest SCL PATHway services that are aligned with our playbooks. It is our hope that the playbooks will provide the guidance each school needs to become a thriving institution.

APPENDIX C

Sample Schedule
for Site Visit

ARRIVAL DAY

Time	Event	SCL Team	School Team
4:30 PM	Team Orientation	All	None
6:30 PM	Dinner and Board Focus Group	All	HoS Board Members

DAY 1

Time	Event	SCL Team	School Team
7:30-8:30	Faculty focus groups simultaneous Lower school (Location) Upper school (Location) *Coffee and pastries provided	All (split)	Lower Upper
8:30-9:00	Tour of School (Admissions style)	All	
9:00-10:00	Student focus groups, simultaneous Upper (Location) Middle (Location)	All (split)	
10:00-11:00	Advancement focus group (Location)	Part	Department members
10:00-11:45	Observe upper school classes	Part	
11:45 - 1:15	Lunch and teamwork	All	
1:15-3:15	Observe classes – upper or lower, specials	All	
2:00-3:00	Finance focus group (Location)	Part	Department members
2:00-3:35	Observe classes	Part	
3:35	Dismissal of lower school and Doxology (Location)	All	
3:45	Students cleaning (work program)	All	
6:00	Team dinner (Location)	All	None

UNIQUE TO THIS SCHOOL (Examples listed below)
Morning flag
The Great Conversation - Integrated Humanities for grades 9-11
Exeter math (Grades 8, 10, 11, 12) - Problem based learning
Cantabile (all grades, Mon-Thur before lunch)
Kindergarten schedule (8:30-12:30 Mon-Fri)
Patriotic education (Seniors on Monday and Wednesday)

DAY 2

Time	Event	SCL Team	School Team
7:30-8:30	Parent focus groups simultaneous Lower school (Location) Upper school (Location) *Coffee and pastries provided	Part	Parents
8:45	Chapel (Location)	All	
9:00-11:30	Observe classes (lower and upper)	Part	
9:30-10:30	Admin (B-ring) leaders focus group	Part	Direct reports sans HOS
10:30-11:30	Academic leaders focus group	Part	Academic dean and division heads
11:30-2:00	Accreditation team work time (Location)	All	None
12:00-2:00	Include any special traditions/classes you want the team to see	All	
2:15	Head of School & board chair (if available) interview	Part	Head of School Board Chair
3:30	Head of School interview	All	Head of School
5:00	Accreditation team work time (Location)	All	

FOCUS GROUPS

Lower School Students [Participants]	Lower School Parents [Participants]	Upper School Faculty [Participants]
Upper School Students [Participants]	Upper School Parents [Participants]	Lower School Faculty [Participants]
Executive Team (B Ring) [Participants]	Academic Team [Participants]	Advancement [Participants]
Operations and Finance [Participants]	Board of Trustees [Participants]	

ADDRESSES:
School
Hotel
Dinner locations

WHO'S WHO
Names and job titles for everyone
the team will meet with

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Great appreciation is extended to the many classical Christian leaders who selflessly devoted countless hours to compile wisdom garnered through years of labor and service in this classical Christian education movement. Without their efforts, this accreditation program—with its standards and indicators of thriving schools—and the supporting playbooks and resources would not have been possible.

SCL Junto Council

Kevin Clark – Founder, President | The Ecclesial Schools (Oviedo, FL)

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Craig Hefner – Head of School | Covenant School (Huntington, WV)

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Josh McCroskey – Head of School | Ad Fontes Academy (Manassas, VA)

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