



APPROVAL vs ACCREDITATION

What's the difference?

Overview

Approval is mandatory and confirms a school meets state standards and is eligible to operate.

Accreditation is voluntary and reflects a deeper commitment to continuous improvement through an external review process.

Cognia is currently used for both Approval and Accreditation in North Dakota.

Understanding both helps administrators align school priorities with state expectations and facilitate long-term growth.

APPROVAL

Required for every public school

A **mandatory** process that ensures each school is compliant with state laws and educational standards.

Cognia strategy maps are high-level planning tools that schools use to outline strategic goals and track improvement efforts over a 3–5 year period. Required to be updated annually by state law, each public school submits a strategy map as part of its Continuous Improvement Plan. These maps include themes, initiatives, and measurable objectives tailored to individual schools but aligned with district goals.

NDDPI collects and publishes these maps on the ND Insights Dashboard to ensure transparency and accountability. Schools update their maps through Cognia's eProve platform, with submission due by June 1 each year, and NDDPI manages the review and public reporting process to support ongoing improvement.

Essential Components for School Approval:

- Curriculum Standards
- Licensed Teachers
- Building Safety
- Instructional Hours
- Background Checks
- Continuous improvement (Complete via Cognia)
- Appropriate Teaching Assignments
- Approved Transcripts System

ACCREDITATION

Not required for school approval

A **voluntary** quality assurance process that evaluates schools based on educational standards and continuous improvement.

Unlike approval, accreditation involves meeting national standards, engaging in reflective self-study, and undergoing an independent external review.

It signals that a school is striving not just to meet the minimum but to elevate student achievement, professional practices, and community trust through sustained, evidence-based growth.

Choosing an Accreditation Provider:

- The superintendent of public instruction shall contract with a nationally recognized accreditation organization to provide accreditation to public schools at no cost. (Currently Cognia is the selected vendor)
- A school may use the state-provided accreditation option or select an accreditation option from the state-approved list that best aligns to the instructional goals and operational needs of the school.
- If a school chooses to use a nationally recognized accreditation organization from the state approved list rather than the state-provided option, the school is responsible for any accreditation-related costs.