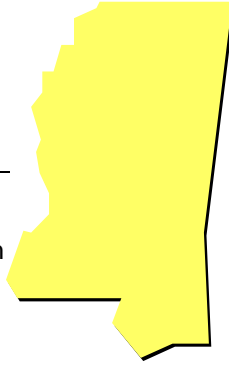


MISSISSIPPI



Accreditation in Mississippi is voluntary and private schools may seek accreditation either through the state or through a private agency.

ACCREDITATION, LICENSING & APPROVAL

Applies to all private schools

- Any private school may seek accreditation from the state Board of Education. The approval process is promulgated by the state Board of Education; the board may not adopt more stringent standards for approval of private schools than the accreditation standards applied to public schools.
- As an alternative to approval by the state Board of Education, private schools may seek accreditation through a private accrediting organization.

Applies only to accredited private schools

- For initial accreditation by the state, a newly applying private school must be fully operational and must substantiate its compliance with all accreditation requirements of the state Board of Education. Sufficient data to substantiate compliance must be available at the time of the initial accreditation audit. Each private school seeking initial accreditation must have conducted a program of educational services for a period of at least a calendar year prior to the date of proposed accreditation.
- Private schools accredited by the state must reapply for accreditation annually. Completed applications must be received no later than Oct. 1 of each school year. Required data include: Name, mailing address and telephone number(s) of the school; name of the chief school administrator; name, address and phone number of the chairperson of the governing board; number of students enrolled by grade, race and sex; number of instructional staff members by grade level and total; annual calendar of the school; participation in federal and state funded programs; graduation data; and a preliminary list of school staff.
- Accreditation statuses assigned by the state Board of Education are (a) accredited, (b) advised, (c) probation and (d) withdrawn. A private school is assigned an “advised” status the first year it fails to comply with all requirements; it will be assigned a “probation” status if it was assigned an “advised” status the previous school year and has not taken corrective actions or has not resolved the deficiencies that resulted in the “advised” status. Schools on probation are required to develop a corrective action plan to address their deficiencies (see below). If a school has been previously assigned a status of “probation” and fails to meet the goals and timelines for resolving identified deficiencies as stated in its approved corrective action plan, its accreditation will be withdrawn.
- The chief school administrator is informed in writing when information on file in the state Department of Education indicates that the school may be in violation of accreditation requirements. The school then has 30 days to respond in writing to any deficiency cited. During the 30-day period, school officials may schedule a conference with appropriate Department of Education staff members to discuss the deficiencies cited. If the school's written response includes appropriate evidence needed to resolve the deficiencies, these corrections will be made on the records of the school. If insufficient evidence is submitted or if the school verifies that the cited deficiencies do exist, the school's records will be presented to the state Board of Education for appropriate action. A school found in violation of federal and state regulations regarding special education will be provided

specific timeframes for correction of deficiencies. If timelines are not met, the school's records will be presented to the state Board of Education for appropriate action.

- When a school receives official notification that it has been assigned a status of "probation," the school is required to file a corrective action plan within 60 days. The plan must state what will be done to resolve the deficiency and include a required timeline. The plan must be approved by the school's governing body or policy-making authority, as documented by official minutes or resolutions. As an indication of mutual agreement, the plan must bear the signatures of the presiding officer of the governing body and the chief administrator of the school. The corrective action plan must be submitted to the state's Office of Accreditation. The state Board of Education will designate Department of Education staff to review the plan. After the plan is approved by the department, written notice is given to school officials. When corrective action has been implemented to resolve a citation, the school must submit documentary evidence confirming this. Assigned department staff may conduct follow-up visits as necessary to verify corrective action and compliance. The school must provide a written account outlining progress made toward eliminating each deficiency remaining on record prior to the next annual meeting of the board. Based on the report, the board has final authority to take appropriate action concerning the school's accreditation status.
- The state Board of Education may withdraw a private school's accreditation only when (a) the school fails to submit a corrective action plan as required, (b) the school fails to meet the goals and timelines for resolving identified deficiencies as stated in its corrective action plan, (c) accumulated violations are of such a serious nature that special action by the board is warranted, or (d) an intentional act of reporting false information is confirmed. Before a school's accreditation status is withdrawn, the school must be notified in writing of the option to voluntarily withdraw from the accreditation process without prejudice. If school officials choose not to withdraw, they may appeal to the board to reconsider.
- When the accreditation of a private school is rescinded, the school may not be reconsidered for accreditation until a full school year has passed. Prior to being reconsidered as an accredited nonpublic school, the school must be evaluated by a committee designated by the board. If the committee confirms that the school is in compliance with all accreditation requirements and standards, then the reinstatement status of the school will be "probation" for one school year.
- Each accredited private school must be governed through official policies approved by its governing body or policy-making authority. The policies must be in writing, on file in the school's administrative office, and must ensure that rules and regulations are established under which the school is administered.
- An accredited private school must have a mission statement, submitted in writing, based on the needs of the target population (students, clients, etc.) to be served. The school must review the educational status of the school in annual strategic planning and address specific actions to improve the quality of its educational programs.
- Each accredited private school must be headed by a full-time, appropriately licensed administrator who is located at the school site and operates the school in accordance with established policies and procedures.
- All professional positions requiring licensed staff at accredited private schools must be filled by staff members who are properly licensed and endorsed. Religious instruction provided by a religious order and its ordained members and cultural instruction provided by a tribal organization are excluded from this requirement.
- Schools must obey all state and federal education laws.

TRANSPARENCY & REPORTING

Applies only to accredited private schools

- Private schools accredited by the state Board of Education are required to submit four annual reports: (1) Annual Application Form, (2) Annual Compliance Report, (3) Annual Personnel Data Report and (4) Summer School/Extended Year Report. All required data must be submitted within established timelines. The chief administrator of the private school is responsible for ensuring the accuracy and integrity of all data reported to the board.
- All students must complete certificates of enrollment when entering an accredited private school, including name, address and contact information, as well as the name and address of the private school and a description of the type of education the student will receive. Parents and school officials must sign the certificate. The certificate must be returned to the student's local school attendance officer by Sept. 15 each year.
- The state Board of Education designates staff in the state Department of Education to conduct field audits of private schools to determine compliance with accreditation requirements and standards. The results of all on-site audits are compiled in a report and noted in each school's accreditation records.
- On-site accreditation audits of private schools must be scheduled on a five-year cycle and are conducted by a team of trained evaluators under the supervision of a state Department of Education auditor or other designated staff. The scheduled site visit is conducted at the expense of the private school.
- Accredited private schools must have adequate written procedures describing their administrative and accounting controls. The state Department of Education may review all accounting records and/or request an independent audit of such records.
- Each new applicant seeking initial accreditation must demonstrate a fiscally sound basis of operation.
- Accredited private schools must maintain permanent and cumulative records for individual students regarding academic achievement and other required data maintained and disseminated in compliance with state and federal law. The permanent record must contain (a) legal name and address of the student, (b) date of birth as verified by birth certificate, (c) courses taken and grades or proficiency level earned, (d) immunization record, (e) date of withdrawal or graduation, (f) Social Security number [optional], (g) record of performance on required graduation tests, and (h) any other information required by the state Board of Education.
- Cumulative records of transfer students must be mailed promptly upon request of the receiving school and may not be withheld for any reason. In the event that a student's records are lost or destroyed, the principal of the school that the student last attended must initiate a new record.
- Accredited private schools may not permanently enroll a transfer student from out of state until a copy of the student's birth certificate (or other legal document that verifies date of birth) has been presented.
- Accredited private schools must be operated under an annual budget or revision approved by the school's governing body or policy-making authority. Schools must have adequate written procedures describing their administrative and accounting controls, which must ensure the following: an accurate, current and complete disclosure of the financial results of the school's operation; an adequate identification of the source and the application of funds provided for the school; the effective control of and accountability for cash property and other assets; and records showing allowable expenditures, supported by source documentation and consistent with the budget. The state Department of Education reserves the right to review all accounting records and/or request an independent audit of such records.
- If the state Board of Education is furnishing free textbooks to the students in an accredited private school, the school must file any reports the board may require annually. Failure to comply results in a loss of funding.

CURRICULUM & ACADEMICS

Applies only to accredited private schools

- The academic year must provide a minimum of 180 teaching days in which both teachers and students are in regular attendance for scheduled instruction.
- The opening day of the school year for students must be scheduled no earlier than Aug. 1 and the closing date no later than June 15.
- Student-teacher ratios may not exceed the following: in kindergarten, 22 to one, or 27 to one if a full-time teaching assistant is provided. In grades one to four, 27 to one unless approved by the state Board of Education.
- Each teaching day must provide at least 330 minutes of instruction or 27.5 hours per five-day week.
- Private schools must ensure that a minimum of 140 hours of instruction per year are provided for each unit of credit offered and 70 hours for each half unit offered, except for accelerated learning programs and remedial instructional programs that are proficiency-based. A traditional seven-period day schedule must provide at least 48 minutes per period, and A/B and 4x4 block schedules must provide at least 94 minutes.
- No more than two of the 180 school days may be short (60 percent) days, unless the school is using an early-release schedule that provides at least 27.5 hours per five-day week, provided there are at least 198 minutes of actual instruction or testing and the remainder of each 60-percent day is used for professional development or other activities related to instruction.
- Each classroom teacher must have an unencumbered period of time during the teaching day to be used for individual or departmental planning. If the school uses a traditional six-period or seven-period day schedule, the required instructional planning time for secondary teachers is a minimum of 225 minutes per week, exclusive of the lunch period. If the school uses any form of a modular/block schedule, the instructional planning time provided is a minimum of either 225 minutes per week or an average of 225 minutes per week per instructional cycle, exclusive of the lunch period. Instructional planning time for the elementary school teacher must be no fewer than 150 minutes per week, exclusive of the lunch period.
- The school must schedule preparation for graduation ceremonies such that graduating seniors are absent from classes no more than three days prior to the end of the school year.
- The school's curriculum must be in conformity with its mission statement and in keeping with the needs, aptitudes and potential of the students enrolled.
- Elementary (K-eight) curricula must include the basic academic areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education and the arts. Subjects may be taught by regular classroom teachers (for example, schools need not have a separate art teacher).
- The curriculum of each diploma-granting secondary school (grades nine-12) must consist of approved courses necessary to meet state graduation requirements. These include four units of English, four units of math, three units of science, three units of social studies, a half unit of health, one unit of business and technology, one unit of the arts, and 4½ units of electives. Specific courses to meet these unit requirements are designated by the state.
- Individual teachers in grades nine-12 teaching regular education courses are limited to three course preparations per scheduling cycle, or five in the same subject/content area. Any assignment of more than five course preparations must be submitted to the state Board of Education for review and action.
- Schools must follow an established policy that defines criteria for the academic promotion, progression and retention of students from one grade or level to the next. Such criteria must prohibit the retention of students for extracurricular activities.

- Each regular-graded elementary school and diploma-granting secondary school must annually administer a nationally standardized achievement test in any three grades appropriate to the grade-level configuration of the school. All students enrolled in the selected grades must participate in the testing program.
- Any transfer student from a school or educational program not accredited regionally or by the state Board of Education or its designee must be given either one or more standardized achievement tests or teacher-made special subject tests to determine the appropriate classification of the student within 30 days after filing for transfer. Notice of the administration of these tests must be given to the applicant at least five days in advance.
- Each accredited private school must have a well-organized and well-managed library appropriate to its size (different specifications are provided based on the size of the school). Each school must have a library-media center with an organized collection of materials and equipment that represents a broad range of current learning media, including instructional technology. Each library-media center must be staffed by a licensed library media specialist or paraprofessional under the leadership of a licensed library media specialist. A school with a student enrollment of 499 or fewer may have a half-time position.
- Accredited private schools must provide adequate instructional space for the number of students enrolled and access to appropriate equipment and laboratory experiences must meet the instructional requirements of the science program.
- Accredited private schools must implement a professional development program that complies with the Mississippi Professional Development Model and its guiding Principles of Excellence.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Applies to all private schools

- The state must notify the private school if one of its employees is convicted of a sexual crime.
- Any principal, teacher or other school employee who has knowledge of any unlawful activity that occurred or may have occurred on educational property or during a school-related activity must report the activity to the superintendent of the school district or his designee, who must notify the appropriate law enforcement officials as required by this section.
- If a student enrolled at a private school is arrested, the court must notify the student's school of his arrest within one week. If a student is brought to trial, the court must notify the student's school within one week.

Applies only to accredited private schools

- Accredited private schools must provide facilities that are clean, safe and operational and must have a regular schedule of inspection and maintenance. The school's physical plant must have adequate facilities and operational equipment, including lighting, heating, ventilation, water supply, toilets and school furniture appropriate for the size and age of the students. Adequate custodial personnel and the methods and frequency of housekeeping (including the adaptation and arrangement of rooms) must ensure a clean, sanitary, safe, pleasant and stimulating school environment.
- Accredited private school facilities must be inspected and approved by the local fire marshal or fire department every year.
- Accredited private schools must keep documentation on file validating that the school complies with state laws regarding fire drills and safety procedures.
- Fully charged, recently inspected fire extinguishers must be readily available.
- All chemicals must be clearly labeled to indicate their contents and possible hazards and stored according to the manufacturer's label directions.

- Each accredited private school must have a School Safety Plan on file that has been approved by its governing body or policy-making authority. The plan must include a disaster plan with regularly scheduled drills for natural and man-made disasters.
- The school cafeteria must meet the standards of the state Board of Health. A license to operate the cafeteria and/or to serve food must be current and posted.
- All students enrolled in accredited private schools must comply with immunization requirements.
- When transportation services are provided, accredited private schools must ensure that each vehicle has a valid inspection sticker; each driver has a valid driver's license or a commercial driver's license to operate a bus and operates the bus according to all specified safety procedures; the school has on file a yearly motor vehicle report on each driver; and the school has on file evidence that each driver has received two hours of in-service training per semester. Emergency bus-evacuation drills must be conducted at least twice a year.

MISCELLANEOUS

Applies only to accredited private schools

- Textbooks must be distributed and loaned free of cost to all schools that maintain educational standards equivalent to the standards established by the state Department of Education for public schools, as outlined in the Private Schools Accreditation Requirements of the state Board of Education.
- Each accredited private school must design and implement student support services appropriate to its particular situation and students. Student support personnel may include school guidance counselors and/or other appropriately licensed student support staff, including nurses, social workers, psychometrists, psychologists, etc. Student support personnel may provide only those services and activities in the area(s) that each individual is specifically qualified to provide.



This list was compiled by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice based on publicly available laws and regulations. In each state we sought the assistance of the state's Department of Education in ensuring the accuracy of our information. However, given the enormous volume of relevant laws and regulations, some errors or omissions may still occur. The Friedman Foundation welcomes suggestions for corrections or additions to this list. For more information on the regulation of private schools, see "Fifty Educational Markets: State Laws and Regulations Governing Private Schools" by Friedman Foundation Senior Fellow Chris Hammons.