

PENNSYLVANIA



ACCREDITATION, LICENSING & APPROVAL

Applies to all private schools

- All private schools must register with the state. All private schools must apply to the state Board of Education for a license to operate unless they are run by churches or have been accredited by a regional accrediting agency. Church-run and accredited private schools are not required to seek a license, but may do so if they wish.

Applies only to licensed private schools

- The initial application for a license must be accompanied by a license fee of \$250, which is considered a processing fee that will not be refunded if the license is denied.
- A private school license is issued for a term of one year and must be renewed every year. The annual renewal fee is based on the enrollment and grade level of the school.
- People who wish to start a new licensed private school must attend a state-run orientation and training program.
- Applicants must provide information about the school, its facilities, staff and teacher credentials, scope and type of programs, fee schedules, mission statement, educational philosophy, assessment, school organization and school governance.
- Licenses are not transferable to a new owner if the school changes ownership; new owners must file for a new license at least 30 days before the effective date of the change in ownership.
- A school that operates at more than one location must obtain a license for each location. The school license must be displayed in a conspicuous manner in each location.
- If the premises of a school are leased or owned, a copy of the occupying lease or a copy of the deed must be attached to the application for a license. The occupying lease agreement may not be for a period of less than a year.
- In addition to the school license, private school directors must personally obtain a letter of approval. Each private school director must submit an application; a \$35 nonrefundable processing fee; three letters of reference from previous employers stating previous experience in educational administration, supervisory, teaching and other educational activities, indicating the location and length of service for each; a full and clear description of the role and responsibilities of the director; and a state teaching certificate in a subject or grade level for which the school is licensed. The letter of approval applies only to the specific school and job description stated at the time of application. A director may be approved for no more than two schools licensed under the same ownership.
- Only teachers holding a valid state professional certificate, a private academic teaching certificate or a private academic temporary approval certificate may teach in a licensed private school. Persons holding a college degree may apply for exemptions to this requirement.
- Assistant teachers must have completed at least two years of college with a specialization in child development.
- All private school professional staff must be people of good moral character, at least 18 and qualified for the responsibilities they assume.
- Before a private school is issued an initial license, staff members of the state Board of Education visit the proposed school site to verify the information contained in the application and to ensure compliance with state regulations. After the initial license is

- issued, board staff members may make return visits to the school within a relicensure period. These visits may be made without prior notice to the school.
- State regulations provide specific procedures for handling complaints against schools, holding hearings for schools under investigation for violation of state regulations and for revocation of licenses.

TRANSPARENCY & REPORTING

Applies to all private schools

- All private schools must report annually their student enrollment as of Oct. 1 of the preceding year.
- Private schools must provide to the superintendent of the local school district the names and addresses of all students ages six to 18, names of students who withdraw from the school and names of students who are absent more than three days in a row.
- No person may solicit or procure a prospective student within the state to enroll in a private school through an enrollment agreement while off school premises unless that person is licensed as an admissions representative of the school.

Applies only to licensed private schools

- Each director and owner of a licensed private school is responsible for answering parental questions or concerns regarding the school's educational program, operation and management. Questions or concerns that are not satisfactorily resolved may be brought to the attention of the state Board of Education.
- If a licensed private school closes, it must provide evidence that it has available financial resources or forms of surety adequate to reimburse unearned tuition unless it collects tuition no more than 30 days in advance.
- Licensed private schools must maintain complete, accurate and detailed financial records, which must include data pertaining to assets, liabilities, sources and amounts of income and the character and amounts of expenditures. Financial records must be kept current and available for inspection by state Board of Education members during regular school hours. These records must be audited annually. The results of the audit must be on file at the school, retained for at least five years and made available to the board upon request.
- If a licensed private school closes, its intent to close must be conveyed in writing to the state Board of Education, parents, school employees and the school districts where its students reside at least 30 days in advance of the last day of planned operation. The school must forward the records of enrolled students to the schools they will attend.
- Licensed private schools must maintain student health records in the school building. They must be available to the school nurse at all times. The original health records must follow a student when transferring to another school.
- Licensed private schools must keep complete, accurate and detailed records of each individual student and of group conditions and activities, including the number of hours of instruction received in each subdivision of the curriculum, attendance, scholastic achievement, test scores, personal characteristics, health and co-curricular activities. Records must be kept current and available for inspection during regular school hours by representatives of the state Board of Education.
- Each year, licensed private schools must consolidate academic transcripts for all students who have graduated, terminated or withdrawn during the year and store these transcripts separately.
- Financial charges must be accurate and clear. Application and dormitory fees are regulated by the state. Materials purchased by students as part of their tuition are the property of the student.

- A licensed private school must give careful and detailed consideration to cases of withdrawal or dismissal of students and must have written statements to justify its procedure for the retention or refunding of unearned fees or charges. These statements must be provided to parents before enrollment. State regulations provide timelines and dollar amounts for tuition refunds based on date of withdrawal.
- School advertising, brochures and catalogs must be clear and accurate. State regulations require publicity materials of licensed private schools to explain policies such as admissions procedures, tuition costs, refund policies and graduation requirements.
- Licensed private schools must enroll students through a written agreement, which shall be the binding contract between the school and the student. The school also may use an application signed by the student. The student must be provided with publications describing the subject matter of the instruction contracted for and a letter of acceptance by the school.

CURRICULUM & ACADEMICS

Applies to all private schools

- Private school teachers and administrators must affirm and develop among students allegiance to and respect for the U.S. flag and promote a clear understanding of our American way of life, with all of its unparalleled individual opportunities, and of our republican form of government, with its responsiveness to majority decisions and demands. Private schools must provide instruction in the fundamental principles of our form of government and an understanding of the provisions of the U.S. and Pennsylvania constitutions; the values to be found in the freedom of speech, of religion and of the press; the values to be found in obedience to the laws of the land and the commonwealth; the importance of exercising the right of franchise; and the obligation of every citizen to stand ready to defend our country at all times from infiltration or aggression by those whose acts and ideologies are contrary to our American philosophy of life.
- Private schools must be in session for at least 180 days of instruction. State requirements for the number of hours per day vary by grade.

Applies only to licensed private schools

- Licensed private schools must observe and comply with all curriculum requirements of the state, including courses in reading, writing, math, science, social studies, physical education, art, music, history, government, geography, health and safety. Written planned course outlines must be kept on file.
- Graduation requirements for private high school students are provided by the state. To receive a diploma from a private high school, a student must have completed the following courses: English, four planned courses of 120 clock hours each; mathematics, three planned courses of 120 clock hours each; science, three planned courses including laboratory sciences of 120 clock hours each; social studies, three planned courses of 120 clock hours each (history and government of the United States and Pennsylvania must be taught as required in the public schools); and health, one planned course. A school may offer any of the following planned courses as a unit of credit toward graduation: foreign languages, vocational education, business education, industrial a, home economics, computer science, consumer education, art and music.
- Licensed private schools must have instructional materials and indoor/outdoor equipment compatible with the school's philosophy, objectives and teaching methodology that will accommodate the number of children enrolled in the school.
- The state provides guidelines for the ages of students in specific grade levels, minimum facility size, minimum outdoor spaces needed and library size and holding requirements.
- The state provides guidelines for student-teacher ratios based on the size of the school.

- Licensed private schools must provide and maintain chalk boards or their equivalents in each classroom, placed at heights appropriate for the age level and grade level of the students using them.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Applies to all private schools

- Private schools must ascertain that every student seeking admission for the first time has been immunized. Parents may seek an exemption for medical or religious reasons.
- The state may loan educational materials developed by either the state Department of Education or the state Department of Health for instruction on the nature and effects of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and dangerous controlled substances to private school students. Private school teachers may attend training programs on this topic held by the state.
- Prospective employees at private schools are required to submit a state criminal background check with their application or a federal background check if the applicant is from another state. The applicant may not be hired if the report indicates he or she has been convicted of certain crimes (the state specifies a long list of them) within the previous five years.
- A school employee who has reasonable cause to suspect, on the basis of professional or other training and experience, that a student is a victim of serious bodily injury, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation by a school employee must immediately contact the school administrator and/or local law enforcement.
- Fire extinguishers in schools and school buses may not contain carbon tetrachloride.
- All vehicles owned by or under contract with any private school to be used in the transportation of students must conform to standards prescribed by the state.
- School buildings must conform to applicable fire and panic requirements and meet state and local environmental and health codes.
- Before entering a school, students must have a complete medical examination, including appropriate visual and hearing evaluations, by a licensed physician and at the expense of the parents. The examination may be conducted by a school physician or family physician and must be reported on forms supplied by the school.
- Students entering a school in grades three and seven must have a dental examination. The examination may be conducted by a school dentist or family dentist and must be reported on forms supplied by the school.

Applies only to licensed private schools

- Artificially lit facilities must be adequate and safe and must provide the minimum foot-candles required by relevant regulations.
- Heating facilities must be sufficient to provide for the maintenance of normal room temperature in rooms occupied by students when the outside temperature is less than normal room temperature, not including gymnasiums and rooms used for sleeping purposes.
- Licensed private schools must maintain cleanliness and orderliness in indoor and outdoor areas.
- Licensed private schools must maintain an approved first aid kit for emergency treatments, which must be readily available and in the charge of at least one staff member competent to administer first aid.
- School nursing services must be provided, either through the public school system in which the private school is located or by a certified school nurse employed by the private school.
- A licensed private school must provide evidence of fire and liability insurance for premises and occupants.
- A licensed private school must have at least two adults present at the school while students are in attendance. Children may not be left unattended, indoors or outdoors, at any time.

- School playgrounds adjacent to a public highway, waterway, ditch or other unsafe surroundings must be fenced or have natural barriers to restrict these areas.
- Licensed private schools must have a listed telephone number.
- Licensed private schools must have a written plan for emergency evacuations and conduct monthly fire drills.
- Applicants for employment must be examined by a physician, including a test for tuberculosis, and must present a health certificate from a physician stating that the person has no physical or mental conditions that make it impossible to perform duties within the school. The certificate must be kept on file at the school.
- School buses must be inspected and approved by the state police. Operators of school buses must be examined and certificated.
- The state provides requirements for the minimum number of toilets and washbowls per student, based on school size and grade level. Girls and boys must have separate facilities. If the toilet and washbowl facilities are not child-sized, platforms or steps of proper size must be provided.
- Radiators, fireplaces and heating and cooling devices within indoor classrooms must be equipped with shields or guards for protection against contact injuries. Kerosene, electric or other types of portable heaters may not be used in classrooms.
- Wall and floor coverings and furniture must be of a type and quality that will ensure safe and sanitary conditions.

MISCELLANEOUS

- All private schools must display the U.S. flag, not less than three feet in length, in all school buildings during each day the schools are in session.
- The state may loan textbooks to private schools.
- School districts may transport children to private schools within guidelines established by the state.



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.