



Start a School

AN EDUCATION FREEDOM FOUNDATION INITIATIVE

Mississippi

Private Schools

A Mississippi private school is an institution for the teaching of children, consisting of a physical plant, whether owned or leased, including a home, instructional staff members and students, and which is in session each school year. This definition shall include, but not be limited to, private, church, parochial, and home instruction programs. [Miss. Code Ann. § 37-13-91 \(2\) \(I\)](#). For the 2024 school year, there are 237 private schools serving 50,821 students in Mississippi (there are 1,048 public schools, serving 444,117 students). 10% of all K-12 students in Mississippi are educated in private schools (compared to the national average of 10%). The average private school tuition is \$5,894 for elementary schools and \$6,458 for high schools (view national tuition averages).

Steps to Start a Private School

1. Select a name for your school. Retain this name throughout the duration of the school's operation.
2. Designate a Chief Administrative Officer. Select a title, such as Director, Principal, Superintendent, etc.
3. Register as a corporation. This is usually a for-profit LLC. Register with your state's Division of Corporations.
4. Things to consider
 - 4.1. Accreditation: is optional. OptimaEd has been accredited by Cognia.
 - 4.2. Teacher Certification: Teacher certification is required for those schools that choose to be accredited by the State Board of Education.
 - 4.3. Registration: Is not required.
 - 4.4. Licensing: Business licensing may be required by local government.
 - 4.5. Approval: Is required.
 - 4.6. Length of School Year and Days: A nonpublic school term is the number of days that each school requires for promotion from grade to grade
 - 4.7. Curriculum: See statutes below for requirements.
 - 4.8. State Testing: Nonpublic schools do not participate in the statewide assessment system and are not assigned a school performance classification
 - 4.9. Health and Safety: Minimal requirements. See statutes below.

- 4.10. Nursing and Health: There is no state policy at this time pertaining to nursing and health for private schools.

Private School Statutes & Rules

The Education Freedom Foundation has relied on the [U.S. Department of Education's State Regulation of Private and Home Schools Map](#) for relevant statutes. Over time, the state pages on this map have been updated since their initial creation. In some cases, states have changed their laws without these updates being reflected on the map. Given the various methods each state uses to publicize changes to its laws, the most recent information for the Start-A-School project was often obtained directly from the U.S. Department of Education website. Users are encouraged to verify any information before making decisions based on it.

Accreditation, Registration, Licensing, and Approval

- Accreditation is optional.
 - Nonpublic schools may be accredited by independent nonpublic school accrediting agencies. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-17-9.](#)
 - Nonpublic schools “serving school age students” may request to be accredited by the State Board of Education. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-17-7.](#) See [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards.](#)

[MISS. CODE ANN. § 37-17-7. Accreditation of Nonpublic Schools.](#)

Any nonpublic school may, through its governing body, request that the State Board of Education approve such institution. Approval shall be based upon a process promulgated by the State Board of Education; provided, however, that in no event shall the State Board of Education adopt more stringent standards for approval of nonpublic schools than the accreditation standards applied to public schools.

[MISS. CODE ANN. § 37-17-9. Accreditation by Other Agencies.](#)

This chapter shall not be construed to establish the only accrediting agency in the State of Mississippi, and nothing contained herein shall be construed to prevent any nonpublic school association or associations or group or groups from establishing its or their accrediting agency, unrelated to any such accrediting agency for public schools as established by this chapter. Nothing in the chapter shall prevent such nonpublic school accrediting agency or agencies from functioning in such capacity.

- Download [Accreditation Process Overview](#) PowerPoint
- Registration has no requirements.
- Licensing has no requirements.
- Approval is optional.
 - Nonpublic schools may request approval by the Mississippi State Board of Education. A process set by the State Board of Education will determine approval, but the standards for nonpublic school approval may not be more

rigorous than the accreditation standards for public schools. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-17-7](#). [Miss. State Board of Education Policy Manual](#), §1000, revised September 2012.

- Standards for state approval or accreditation are set out in the policy document [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards, 2023](#).
- Private schools must reapply for accreditation no later than October 1 each year. The application requires information on the following: 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. [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards](#).
- The Mississippi Board of Education assigns an accreditation status from the following four options: accredited, advised, probation and withdrawn. [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards](#).
- The first year an accredited private school fails to comply with state requirements for accreditation, it will be assigned an “advised” status. If the private school does not take corrective action to resolve the deficiencies within the following year, it will be assigned a “probation” status and be required to develop a corrective action plan. If the school with an assigned “probation” status fails to meet the approved corrective action plan’s goals and timelines, the school will receive a “withdrawn” status. [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards](#).

Curriculum

- The secretary of state will furnish without charge applications for voter registration by mail to private schools upon request. [Miss. Code Ann. §23-15-47\(4\)\(a\)](#).
- Agricultural high schools may be leased by private schools if there are no funds available to run the institution. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-27-31](#).

Health and Safety Requirements

- Church-related and private schools are exempt from Mississippi’s State Board of Health standards for preparation of food. [Miss. Code Ann. §41-3-15](#).
- The circuit court clerk will notify the State Department of Education of any certificated personnel employed by a private elementary or secondary school that is convicted of a felony or of a sex offense. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-3-51](#).
- The president or chancellor of a private school will be notified by the local law enforcement office if any enrolled student is arrested and convicted of a misdemeanor. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-11-29](#).
- The sale or distribution of a controlled substance within 1000 feet of the real property of a private school or 1500 feet of a private school building may be punished by an enhanced penalty, twice the authorized imprisonment or fine or both, for a first offense and three times the penalty for a subsequent offense. [Miss. Code Ann. §41-29-142](#).

Length of School Year and Days

- A nonpublic school term is the number of days that each school requires for promotion from grade to grade. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-13-91\(2\)\(e\)](#).

Nursing and Health

- There is no state policy at this time pertaining to nursing and health for private schools.

Professional Development

- There is no state policy at this time pertaining to professional development at private schools.

Public Aid for Private Education

- Constitutional Provisions: Mississippi's Constitution prohibits the appropriation of any state education funds for the support of sectarian schools or private schools. Miss. Const. Art. 8, Sec. 208.
- Programs for Financial Assistance for Attendance at Private Schools: In 2013, Mississippi began a "state educational loan fund" and an application process for loans from this fund for "students who desire to receive a secular education in any of the grades one through twelve" in any "accredited nonfree elementary or secondary school." To be eligible for a loan an applicant must be a current resident of the state and be able to document attendance in good standing at the nonsectarian private school. If an applicant's loan is granted, it may not exceed \$2,400. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-51-1](#) et seq to [§37-51-15](#).
- Programs for Financial Assistance for Students with Dyslexia: Enacted in 2012, the Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for Students with Dyslexia Program provides scholarships to children with this specific learning disability to attend state accredited special purpose nonpublic schools. Students can go to such a nonpublic school "in order to receive comprehensive multisensory dyslexia therapy delivered by holders of an appropriate license in dyslexia therapy issued by the department." Eligibility is restricted to students in grades 1-6 who have a diagnosis of dyslexia and attended public school or any other state approved nonpublic school in the state that emphasizes instruction in dyslexia intervention the previous school year. The maximum scholarship amount is based on the state's base funding per pupil in any given year. The statute's nonpublic school option is to be repealed effective July 1, 2016. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-173-1](#) et seq to [§37-173-29](#).

Recordkeeping and Reports

- All children of compulsory school age must be enrolled in a public school, private school, or home school program. The parents or guardians of the child or the nonpublic school official must complete a certificate of enrollment for each such student. The certificate,

provided by the State Board of Education, asks the following basic information: 1) name, address, and date of birth of the student; 2) name and address of the parent/guardian; 3) a simple description of the type of education provided; 4) name and address of the nonpublic school; and 5) parent or guardian and school official signatures and date signed. The certificate must be returned to the school attendance officer for the youth or family court where the child resides on or before September 15 of each year. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-13-91\(3\)](#).

- Private, parochial, or denominational schools accepting free school textbooks on behalf of their students must file annual reports as required by the State Board of Education. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-43-51](#).
- State accredited private schools are required to submit an Annual Application Form, an Annual Compliance Report, an Annual Personnel Data Report, and a Summer School/Extended Year Report. [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards](#).

Reimbursement for Performing State and Local Functions

- There is no state policy at this time pertaining to reimbursement for performing state and local functions for private schools.

Special Education

- Mississippi provides financial assistance, determined by the state department of education, to exceptional children attending accredited private or parochial schools. Tuition reimbursement for applicants choosing to attend an accredited private or parochial school is 100% for the first \$600. If the local school district Individual Education Program Committee determines that the district cannot provide a free appropriate public education for a handicapped child, the state will reimburse the district for placement in an accredited private or parochial school up to a maximum of \$3,000. Miss. [Code Ann. §§37-23-3; 37-23-63; 37-23-69](#).

Student Assessment and Graduation Requirements

- Nonpublic schools do not participate in the statewide assessment system and are not assigned a school performance classification. [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards](#).
- A private school student seeking to transfer to a Mississippi public school “may be required to take a test to determine the grade and class to which the pupil shall be assigned at the time of pupil transfer.” [Miss. Code Ann. §37-15-33](#).
- A homeschooled student seeking to transfer to a Mississippi public school “may be required to take a test to determine the grade and class to which the pupil shall be assigned at the time of pupil transfer.” [Miss. Code Ann. §37-15-33](#).

Tax Exemption

- The income from transporting grade school students under contract with nonprofit private schools is exempt from Mississippi sales tax. [Miss. Code Ann. §27-65-107](#).

Teacher Certification

- Teacher certification is required for those schools that choose to be accredited by the State Board of Education. [Nonpublic Schools Accountability Standards](#).

Technology

- There is no state policy at this time pertaining to technology for private schools.

Textbooks

- Students attending state accredited nonpublic schools are allowed to borrow books at no cost from the local school district. [Miss. Code Ann. §37-43-1](#).
- The loan of textbooks to qualified private schools does not violate Mississippi's constitutional prohibition against public support of sectarian schools or the control of educational funds by religious sects. [Chance v. Mississippi State Textbook Rating & Purchasing Bd., 200 So. 706 \(1941\)](#).

Transportation

- There is no state policy at this time pertaining to transportation for private schools.

Resources

Contact Information – State and Federal Departments of Education

- Mississippi Department of Education
359 North West Street
P.O. Box 771
Jackson, MS 39205
Phone: (601) 359-3513
Fax: (601) 359-3242
Website: <https://www.mdek12.org>
- U.S. Department of Education, [Mississippi](#)

Information and Legislation

- [Mississippi Department of Education \(MDE\): Office of Accreditation](#)
- [MDE: Mississippi Nonpublic School Accountability Standards](#)
- [MDE: Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship Program](#)
- [MDE: Government Relations](#)
- [Mississippi Code of 1972 Unannotated](#) Title 37 Education, Chapters 1-169

School Choice Programs

Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Program

The Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Act enacted by the Mississippi Legislature during the 2015 Session created the Education Scholarship Account (ESA) program (Senate Bill No. 2695). It is a program designed to give those parents with special needs children the option of withdrawing their child from the public school system and receiving a designated amount of funds to help defray the cost of private school tuition or other specific allowable activities to educate their child. The administration of this program has been designated to be performed by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). Note that Nonpublic schools participating in this ESA must be located in the state.

Submit an Application

Submit the Educational Scholarship Account (ESA) [Participating School Assurances](#) form.

ESA Statues and Rules

- § 37-181-3. (g) "Eligible school" means a state-accredited special purpose school, a state-accredited nonpublic school, or a nonpublic school located in the state that has enrolled a participating student and is providing services for the participating student's disability or special education needs, or is providing services addressing a participating student's IEP. An eligible school does not include a home instruction program under Section 37-13-91, Mississippi Code of 1972.
- [Miss. Code. Ann. § 37-181-1 to 23 is amended 1 July 2024](#)
- [House Bill 1229 Brings forward statutes amending ESA Program](#)
- [House Bill 4130 Creates The "Mississippi Student Funding Formula"](#)

Nate Rogers Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program

Guidance for Nonpublic Schools

Nonpublic School Requirements:

1. Be accredited by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) as a nonpublic special purpose school to provide and emphasize instruction in speech-language therapy and interventions as the primary purpose of the school and provide a comprehensive speech- language therapy instruction delivered by speech-language pathologists;
2. Use qualified speech-language pathologists with a 215 licensure certified by MDE and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association to provide speech-language services for children with speech-language impairments or who has completed training

in a department-approved American Speech-Language-Hearing Association based speech-language pathology training program, attaining a master's degree in speech-language pathology;

3. Use an appropriate specialized speech-language instructional program that is scientific and research-based;
4. Have a current School Program Verification and Assurances form on file with the MDE Office of Special Education by July 1 of each school year;
5. Provide to MDE all documentation required for a student's participation, including the nonpublic school student's fee schedule;
6. Provide to MDE notification when a parent removes the student from the nonpublic school within ten (10) days from the date of withdrawal;
7. Be academically accountable to the parent or legal guardian for meeting the educational needs of the student by, at a minimum, annually providing to the parent or legal guardian a written explanation of the student's progress;
8. Maintains in the State of Mississippi a physical location where a scholarship student regularly attends classes; and
9. Maintains a current Letter of Accreditation on file with the Office of Special Education.

Questions related to the application process and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) should be directed to Teresa Laney, Office of Special Education, at 601-359-3498.

Questions related to the accreditation of nonpublic schools should be directed to the Office of Accreditation at (601) 359-3764.

Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for Students with Dyslexia Program

Guidance for Public and Non-Public Schools

Nonpublic School Requirements:

1. Be accredited by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) as a special purpose nonpublic school;
2. Use licensed dyslexia therapists or individuals participating in an approved training program (resulting in MDE licensure) to provide dyslexia therapy to students diagnosed with dyslexia;
3. Use daily Orton-Gillingham-based therapy;
4. Have school leadership trained in dyslexia; and
5. Have a current School Program Verification and Assurances form on file with the MDE Office of Curriculum and Instruction.

Nonpublic School Application Process:

1. Student must have a diagnosis of dyslexia, which can be made by a licensed psychologist, psychometrist, or speech language pathologist, as stated in House Bill 1031 (2012).
2. Student must have been accepted for enrollment at a state accredited special purpose nonpublic school that meets all the requirements listed above.
3. Parent completes the Dyslexia Therapy Program / Scholarship Application and submits to the MDE no later than July 15th for the upcoming school year.
4. Application packet includes the completed application, proof of enrollment, verification of diagnosis, and a tuition/fee schedule.
5. The MDE verifies that the student was enrolled in a public school during the previous school year. Note that the student must have been enrolled at the time that average daily attendance (ADA) was determined for the public school systems.
6. The MDE, through the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, notifies the Office of School Financial Services of the number of students by district who will be receiving the dyslexia therapy scholarship. Funds are then transferred to the state accredited special purpose nonpublic school based on a twelve-month payment schedule. Funds are not sent directly to parents.
7. State accredited special purpose nonpublic schools may receive the dyslexia therapy scholarship for students enrolled in a public school during the previous school year.
8. Dyslexia therapy scholarship funding for students who were enrolled in a state accredited special purpose nonpublic school during the previous school year will be requested in the legislative budget request for the next fiscal year. Funding for students enrolled in a state accredited special purpose nonpublic school during the previous school year will be based upon the student count submitted by the state accredited special purpose nonpublic school by June 1st of the previous calendar year and is contingent upon legislative appropriation.

Questions related to the application process should be directed to the Office of Elementary Education and Reading at (601) 359-2586. Questions related to the accreditation of nonpublic schools should be directed to the Office of Accreditation at (601) 359-3764. Questions related to IDEA and Section 504 should be directed to the Office of Special Education at (601) 359-3498.