



Start a School

AN EDUCATION FREEDOM FOUNDATION INITIATIVE

Rhode Island

Private Schools

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: Is not required for private school teachers.
 - 4.3. Registration: Is required.
 - 4.4. Licensing: Is not required.
 - 4.5. Approval: Is required.
 - 4.6. Length of School Year and Days: The period of attendance of students in the non-public schools shall be substantially equal to that required by law in public schools. Public schools are required to establish and maintain a one hundred eighty (180) day school year exclusive of holidays. See statutes
 - 4.7. Curriculum: No requirements. See statutes below.
 - 4.8. State Testing: Private school students' participation in state testing is voluntary.
 - 4.9. Health and Safety Requirements: Immunization is required. See other requirements in the statutes below.
 - 4.10. Nursing and Health: Private schools are required to have a comprehensive health and physical education program. All private school students must participate in health screening requirements. Private schools have regulations for the investment of school nurses that ensure students quality services.

Private School Registration

All Rhode Island non-public schools that serve children in grades K-12 must be approved annually by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). Non-public schools must follow the same legislative requirements as public schools.

Applications for RIDE approval of Non-Public Schools for the upcoming academic year (AY) will be submitted on eRIDE. RIDE will update this page when the approval process is open on eRIDE.

Schools must accurately report their October 1 enrollment data in eRIDE before applying for AY approval.

Please note that current schools who did not submit their enrollment data or non-public schools who do not submit an application will be removed from the RIDE Directory and will not be eligible for certain classifications of federal funding.

If you need assistance with eRIDE, please contact Mario Goncalves at Mario.goncalves@ride.ri.gov and if you have any questions about RIDE's non-public school approval process, please contact Andrew MacMannis at:

Andrew.MacMannis@ride.ri.gov or nonpublicschools@ride.ri.gov

He will send you the S-20 Non-Public School Open Form. Complete it and send it back to him.

Review this [information on Non-Public Schools](#).

Registration for a directory is required for all private schools per RIGL §16-40-11. The directory must show:

- location
- name
- director or principal of school
- grade span
- enrollment
- school approval status.

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 has no requirements.
- Registration is mandatory.
 - Registration with the office of the department of elementary and secondary education is required for all private schools. The registry must show the location, name, director or principal of school, grade span, enrollment, school approval status, and other pertinent facts. [RIGL §§16-40-11, 16-97](#) et. seq.

- Licensing has no requirements.
- Approval is mandatory.
 - Approval by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is required for private schools. [RIGL §16-19-2](#).
 - The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approves private schools that comply with requirements for curriculum, teacher quality, and attendance to the length of school year and instructional time, student health and safety, record keeping, and compliance with state and municipal school site regulations. The commissioner of elementary and secondary education will grant a hearing to private schools that are denied approval. On appeal, the decision of the board of regents is final. [RIGL §§16-19-2, 16-60-4 \(10\), 16-97](#) et. seq.

Curriculum

- A full curriculum for all grades and subjects must be substantially equivalent to that taught in the public schools. Instruction must be provided in the following core academic areas: reading, writing, geography/social studies, arithmetic, the history of the United States and Rhode Island, civics education, and the principles of American government. These subjects must be taught in the English language substantially to the same extent as required in the public schools. Instruction in the principles of popular and representative government under the Rhode Island and United States constitutions must be provided as well as instruction in health and physical education similar to that required in public schools. [RIGL §§16-19-2, 16-22-2, 16-22-4. Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#)
- The school shall have a carefully planned program of study and activities consistent with its policy and objectives, which shall be approved by the commissioner of education. [RIGL §16-19-2. Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#)
- The school shall have a clearly stated educational policy, cooperatively developed and written by the faculty and administration. The statement shall set forth the objectives of the school and the philosophy underlying the methods used to attain these objectives. The performance of each school shall be judged against its policy statement. [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#)
- The school shall have a carefully planned program of study and activities, consistent with its policy and objectives, which shall be approved by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#)
- The school shall provide all students in attendance with instruction in reading, writing, geography, arithmetic, the history of the United States, the history of Rhode Island, the principles of American government and civics. Each subject shall be taught pursuant to [R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 16-19-2 and 16-22-2. Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#)
- The school shall provide all students in attendance with instruction in the principles of popular and representative government as enunciated in the Constitutions of Rhode Island and the United States. Commencing with the fourth grade in elementary schools instruction shall be given in the history and government of Rhode Island and in every high school thorough instruction shall be given in the Constitution and government of

Rhode Island and in the Constitution and government of the United States. [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#)

- In the study of history of the United States and of Rhode Island, there shall be included the major contributions made by African-Americans and other racial and ethnic groups in the development of the United States and the State of Rhode Island. [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#)
- The school shall provide all students in attendance with a health education program in grades K through 12 as appropriate. The health education program shall be approved if deemed substantially equivalent to that required in public schools as defined in the Regulations for School Health Programs of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Health ([216-RICR-20-10-4](#)), [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.5](#).

Health and Safety Requirements

- Students entering private schools must furnish evidence of immunization as prescribed by regulation of the director of health and the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, or a certificate from a licensed physician stating the student is not a fit subject for immunization for medical reasons or a certificate signed by the parent or guardian stating that immunization is contrary to their beliefs. [RIGL §16-38-2](#).
- Private schools must comply with building code standards established by the state building code standards committee. By August 1 of each year, the local fire chief, local building inspector, the director of the state department of health and the director of the state labor and training department must determine and notify the private schools as to whether the schools conform to state law and regulation. Private school officials must ensure that schools are not opened until notification is received; neglect is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500. [RIGL §16-21-3, 3.1](#).
- Effective July 1, 2012, schools including residential child care institutions participating in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program will be subject to revised nutrition requirements intended to improve the health and well-being of students consuming school meals.
- Right to a safe school: "Each student, staff member, teacher, and administrator has a right to attend and/or work at a school which is safe and secure, and which is conducive to learning, and which is free from the threat, actual or implied, of physical harm by a disruptive student." [RIGL §16-2-17](#).
- Private schools are subject to the Rhode Island Safe Schools Act on bullying – a statewide bullying policy, ensuring a consistent and unified statewide approach to the prohibition of bullying at school. [RIGL §§16-21-33, 16-21-34](#).
- Private schools are subject to the RI Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs. [RIGL §16-21-7](#).
- Private schools must instruct and train the pupils by means of drills to leave school buildings and/or be locked down in an emergency in the shortest possible time and without confusion or panic. Fifteen drills are required annually, of which at least eight must be held during September, October, and November. At least four drills must be obstructed, i.e. at least one or more exits and stairways blocked; two of the obstructed drills must be held during September and October and four drills must exercise

lockdown and evacuation procedures. Neglect by a private school to comply is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not exceeding \$500. [RIGL §16-21-4](#).

- Private schools must provide students, teachers, and visitors approved eye protective devices for specified vocational or industrial arts classes and chemical laboratory classes. Students and teachers are required to wear protective devices at all times while participating in the courses. [RIGL §16-21-15](#).
- Retail licenses to sell alcoholic beverages are restricted in areas within 200 feet of any private or parochial K–12 school. [RIGL §3-7-19](#).
- Willful disturbance of a private school is a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding \$500. [RIGL §11-11-1](#).
- It is a criminal offense to willfully trespass on private school property after being suspended from attendance or forbidden by a police officer, guard or school official, punishable by incremental fines for repeated offenses. [RIGL §11-44-26.1](#).
- Possession of a firearm on private school grounds, except for educational purposes, is a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment for not less than one year nor more than five years, or a fine not less than \$500 or more than \$5,000. [RIGL §11-47-60](#).

Length of School Year and Days

- The period of attendance of students in the non-public schools shall be substantially equal to that required by law in public schools. Public schools are required to establish and maintain a one hundred eighty (180) day school year exclusive of holidays. (R.I. Gen. Laws [§§ 16-2-2](#) and [16-19-2](#)) A non-public school may establish a school year that is the equivalent of one hundred eighty (180) days through the use of longer school days in accordance with [R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-2-2](#). If longer school days are used to provide the equivalent of one hundred eighty (180) school days, no fewer than nine hundred ninety (990) hours of actual instructional time must be provided in a single school year. [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.3](#).
- A kindergarten day shall not be less than two and one-half (2 1/2) hours. An elementary and secondary school day shall not be less than five and one half (5 1/2) hours (three hundred and thirty (330) minutes) of actual schoolwork excluding lunch, recess periods, study halls, homeroom, common planning time, student passing time, pre and post school teacher time and any other time that is not actual instructional time. [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.3](#)
- A secondary school class period shall be sufficiently flexible to allow the school to schedule classes four or five times weekly or to provide large group instruction with long or short periods as the program demands, However, a minimum of 200 minutes weekly in class shall normally-be required for each subject for which credit (for graduation) is allowed. [Rhode Island Board of Education Regulations 200-20-20-5.3](#)

Nursing and Health

- Private schools are required to have a comprehensive health and physical education program. All private school students must participate in health screening requirements. Private schools have regulations for the investment of school nurses that ensure students quality services. [RIGL §16-21](#) et. seq.

- Private schools may participate in the federally funded school lunch program operated in the state. [RIGL §16-8-7](#) et. seq.
- Private schools are subject to the Rhode Island Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs. [RIGL §16-21-7](#).

Professional Development

- Private school faculty is encouraged to continue professional development throughout their careers. Opportunities for professional development may be sent to private schools by the state through the private school listserv.

Public Aid for Private Education

- Constitutional Provisions: No person shall be compelled to frequent or to support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatever, except in fulfillment of such person's voluntary contract. Rhode Island Constitution Art. I, §3.
- Programs for Financial Assistance for Attendance at Private Schools: In 2007, Rhode Island began the Corporate Scholarship Tax Credit Program, which provides tax credits to corporations that contribute to Scholarship Organizations (SOs). Corporations received a credit valued at 75 percent of the contributions made or 90 percent if the second-year donation is worth at least 80 percent of the first year's donation, with a maximum credit of \$100,000. The state has capped the amount of credits available to be \$1 million. In order for students to be eligible for these corporate scholarships they must be from families whose income does not exceed 250 percent of the federal poverty level. [RIGL §44-62](#) et. seq.

Recordkeeping and Reports

- Private school teachers must keep a register of the names of all students, their sex and age, names of parents or guardians, the time when each student enters and leaves the school, and their daily attendance. Private schools are obligated to prepare reports required by the school committee or Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. [RIGL §16-12-4](#).
- Whenever a K–9 pupil fails to report to school and no indication has been received by the private school that the pupil's parent or guardian is aware of the pupil's absence, the school must make a reasonable effort to notify the parents of the child's absence. School personnel or volunteers organized for this purpose are immune from any civil or criminal liability in connection with the notice to parents. [RIGL §16-19-10](#).
- Private schools that provide multiple kindergarten sessions must make every effort to give written notice to parents about which session their child has been placed 30 days before the start of the school year. [RIGL §16-2-28.2](#).
- Private schools that close are required to make accessible student academic and attendance records as well as to obtain approval from the commissioner of elementary and secondary education as to the method these student records will be made available. [RIGL §16-40-16](#).

Reimbursement for Performing State and Local Functions

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

Special Education

- Notwithstanding any other federal or state law or regulation, the school committee where a parentally placed child who has or develops a disability in private school resides, shall provide the child with the same free and appropriate education as it provides to children in public schools. These children shall have the same rights and remedies in the regulations of the board of regents for elementary and secondary education governing the education of children with disabilities as children in public school relative to initially determining eligibility, implementation and/or any other rights and remedies relative to any special education services the child may be eligible or receive from the public school district. [RIGL §16-24-1](#).

Tax Exemption

- Rhode Island has a state policy that recognizes tax-exempt status for private schools. [RIGL §44-3-3](#).

Teacher Certification

- Certification is not required for private school teachers. In general, teachers are expected to maintain and develop up-to-date competencies with appropriate professional development in the content area or grade levels they teach. All teachers in private schools must have a national and state criminal records check. [RIGL §§16-9-2, 16-2-18.1](#).

Technology

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

Testing

- Private school students' participation in state testing is voluntary. [RIGL §16-22-9](#).

Textbooks

- Rhode Island loans textbooks free of charge to all pupils of elementary and secondary schools including private schools. Local school districts must loan textbooks in reading/language arts, history/social studies, science, math, and modern foreign languages, as well as texts for some other subject areas. However, the only books that can be loaned are books being used in the public schools of Rhode Island as published

on a state approved textbook list. Other instructional materials will have to be purchased. [RIGL §16-23-2](#).

Transportation

- Rhode Island is divided into five regional transportation areas. Districts must provide transportation for private school students within the district and within the region if no other similar school operates within the district. School committees must provide transportation to and from school for elementary and high school pupils attending private schools if the pupil resides so far from the school as to make the pupil's attendance impractical, or if a student's physical disability or infirmity would make attendance impracticable. Private schools operated for profit are not eligible. [RIGL §16-21-1](#).

Resources

Contact Information--State and Federal Departments of Education

- Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903-3400
Phone: (401) 222-8979
Website: <http://www.ride.ri.gov>
- U.S. Department of Education, [Rhode Island](#)

Information and Legislation

- [Rhode Island Department of Education \(RIDE\): Home Schooling, Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [RIDE: Non-Public Schools](#)
- [RIDE: Board of Education Regulations](#)
- [RIDE: Statutes Pertaining to Education, Title 16](#)
- [State of Rhode Island General Laws](#)
- [NP Guidelines](#)
- [RI Non-Public Legislation Summary](#)
- [RI Non-Public School Standards](#)
- [RI Non-Public School Standards Update](#)
- [RI Non-Public School Guidance](#)
- [Non-Public School Guidance Update](#)

- [§44-62](#) Tax Credits for Contributions to Scholarship Organizations – Index of Sections
- [§44-3](#) Property Subject to Taxation – Index of Sections

School Choice Programs

Tax Credit

Rhode Island’s tax-credit scholarship program offers a 75 percent tax credit to businesses that donate to scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs) or 90 percent if donated for two consecutive years and the second year’s donation is worth at least 80 percent of the first year’s donation. SGOs are non-profits that offer private school scholarships of varying amounts to students from low-income households.

Current SGOs

These qualified scholarship organizations are eligible to receive contributions under this chapter for the 2024 calendar year.

- Achievement for Children with Challenges Empowered by School Scholarships (ACCESS)
- [Children's Tuition Fund of Rhode Island](#)
- F.A.C.E. of Rhode Island
- Scholarships to Economically Poor Students (STEPS)
- Star Scholars Opportunity Program
- Teach Initiative
- The Foundation for Rhode Island Day Schools

SGO Application

Submit a [SGO Application](#) annually. This form must be submitted to the Division of Taxation by December 31 so that the SGO may receive contributions in the upcoming year.

ESA Statutes and Rules

- [44 R.I. Gen. Laws](#)
- [§ 44-62-1. Tax credit for contributions to a scholarship organization — General.](#)
- [§ 44-62-2. Qualification of scholarship organization.](#)
- [§ 44-62-3. Application for tax credit program. \[Effective until January 1, 2024.\]44-62-3. Application for tax credit program. \[Effective January 1, 2024.\]](#)
- [§ 44-62-4. Calculation of tax credit and issuance of tax credit certificate.](#)
- [§ 44-62-5. Limitations.](#)
- [§ 44-62-6. Definitions.](#)

- [§ 44-62-7. Miscellaneous — Lists.](#)
- [§§ 62-1 through 62-7](#)
- [§ 44-62-1. Tax credit for contributions to a scholarship organization — General.](#)
- [§ 44-62-2. Qualification of scholarship organization.](#)
- [§ 44-62-3. Application for tax credit program. \[Effective until January 1, 2024.\]44-62-3. Application for tax credit program. \[Effective January 1, 2024.\]](#)
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