

IEA Program Overview for Participating Private Schools

IEA Program Overview

The IEA Program is a school choice program for eligible students with disabilities. The program provides options for parents of students in grades K–12 to choose the education opportunities that best meet their own unique needs through access to public education funds. The student eligibility requirements are explained on the IEA [‘Student Eligibility’](#) webpage.

After a student has enrolled in the IEA Program, they must enroll in and attend either a private school or an independent home school in accordance with Tennessee’s school attendance law. Students in the IEA Program cannot be enrolled full time in a public school. Students can attend any non-public school once enrolled in the IEA Program, and use the funds for the approved expenses explained in the [IEA Parent Handbook](#).

Becoming a Participating School in the IEA Program

In order to participate in the IEA Program and accept IEA funding from parents for payment for tuition, fees, and/or textbooks, private schools must apply to the Tennessee Department of Education, receive approval, and be placed on the approved list of IEA participating schools for the respective school year.

Applications for schools to participate in the IEA Program are accepted year-round. Applications for private schools to participate in the IEA Program must be completed and submitted by the administrator (e.g., principal) of the school. The application instructions are posted on the [IEA webpage](#).

If school principals have questions about the school application process, please contact the IEA team at IEA.Questions@tn.gov.

Participating School Eligibility Requirements

1. Be located in Tennessee, and be listed on the department’s [non-public schools list](#).
2. Comply with all state laws, rules, and procedures for non-public schools.
3. Comply with all health and safety laws or codes that apply to non-public schools.
4. School staff must have completed criminal background checks as defined by the IEA Program rules (rules of the SBE Chapter 0520-01-11).
 - a. Staff must never have been convicted of a felony, including conviction on a plea of guilty, a plea of nolo contendere, or order granting pre-trial diversion.
5. Exclude from employment any person not permitted by state law to work in a non-public school.
6. Exclude from employment any person who might reasonably pose a threat to the safety of students.
7. Be able to accept the IEA debit card.
8. Do not discriminate against students or applicants on the basis of race, color, or national origin.
9. Comply with the minimum kindergarten age requirement pursuant to T.C.A § 49-6-201(b)(3) Minimum Kindergarten Program Law and the State Board of Education rules for non-public school approval - Chapter 0520-07-02 Non-public School Approval Process.

Participating School Rights

1. A participating school is autonomous and not an agent of the state or federal government.
2. Neither the department nor any other state agency may regulate in any way the educational program of a participating non-public school that accepts funds from the parent of a participating student unless the non-public school is approved directly by the department as a category I or V non-public school.
3. The creation of the IEA Program does not expand the regulatory authority of the state, its officers, or any school district to impose any additional regulation of non-public schools beyond those necessary to enforce the requirements of the program.
4. Participating non-public schools shall be given the maximum freedom to provide for the educational needs of their students without governmental control.
5. A participating non-public school shall not be required to alter its creed, practices, admissions policies, or curriculum in order to accept participating students.

Participating School Responsibilities

1. Comply with all of the IEA state laws, rules, and procedures for participating schools and the requirements set in the [IEA Private School Handbook](#).
2. Be academically accountable to the parent for meeting the educational needs of the student.
3. At a minimum, annually provide to the parent a written explanation of the student's progress.
4. If the student is in grades 3–8, and if requested by the parent, annually administer either a nationally norm-referenced test(s) identified by the department or the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) test(s), or any future replacements of the TCAP test(s).
5. Provide parents with a receipt for all qualifying expenses.
6. Do not hold IEA cards and run them on-site without the parent present or copy credit card information for use at a later date.
7. Annually submit to the department the graduation and completion rates of students in the IEA Program following the instructions provided by the department by the deadline posted on the [IEA webpage](#).
8. If at any time, the information submitted in the school application changes, the school principal must report the changes by emailing IEA.Questions@tn.gov.
9. Do not accept private placement funds for students enrolled in the IEA Program.
10. If a student withdraws from the school and transfers to another school or returns to the school district, refund the tuition and fees on a prorated basis based on the number of days the student was enrolled in the school following the procedures set by the department.
11. Upon a student's withdrawal from the school, send all educational records of the participating student to the school district or other school identified by the parent.
12. If requested by the department, submit to the department a financial audit of the school conducted by a certified public accountant. The purpose of the audit would be to ensure that the school is in compliance with all of the state laws, rules, and procedures.
13. If requested by the department, allow the department to conduct site visits. The purpose of the site visits is solely to verify the information reported by the schools concerning the enrollment and attendance of students, background screening of staff, and compliance with state law, rules, and procedures.

For more information, please visit the [IEA webpage](#) and read the [IEA Private School Handbook](#).