

Non-Public School Approval Process Checklist Categories I, I-Special Purpose, and V

The following checklist is designed to provide school applicants with essential information to successfully navigate the non-public school (NPS) approval process for Categories I, I-Special Purpose, and V. Carefully read the entire checklist before applying. Applicants may direct questions to Private.Schools@tn.gov.

- ☐ Submit an initial application between **January 5 and May 15**, to initiate the application process for the upcoming school year.
 - To access the initial application link, visit the [non-public schools \(NPS\) webpage](#) during the application window.
 - Applications are only accepted during the application window. Due to the nature of some Category I-Special Purpose NPS, exceptions to this policy are made on a case-by-case basis.
- ☐ Schedule and participate in a pre-approval conference with the non-public schools team.
 - Upon receipt of the initial application, the NPS Team emails the school applicant's contact to set up a short pre-approval conference to review the approval process and deadlines.
 - Following the pre-approval conference, applicants receive an email containing a list of required documents to be submitted for review by **July 1**. These items will be discussed during the pre-approval conference.
 - Items include the school handbook, policies, staff roster, staff credentials, criminal history checks, school calendar, approved permits, and similar items that must align with [State Board Rules Chapter 0520-07-02](#) associated with the school's selected category.
- ☐ Initiate a fire safety inspection for educational occupancy by **May 15**.
 - Once an NPS candidate has secured a school site location, the school candidate must email the NPS Team at Private.Schools@tn.gov to initiate an educational occupancy fire safety inspection by the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO).
 - Upon receiving an initial request for inspection, the SFMO takes over the inspection process. School candidates must respond timely to communication from the SFMO to pay fees and submit any additional paperwork that may be required. Building type (i.e., new construction, existing building) and the number of students served will determine whether plans submittal is needed.
 - The **approved inspection permit** must be received by the NPS Team in time to complete the remaining steps of the school approval process and meet the final school approval deadline. Obtaining permits is **not** the final step.
- ☐ As applicable, initiate additional inspections required under city, county, or state law if they have not already been requested.
 - NPS are responsible for ensuring compliance with health and safety rules, laws, and regulations.

- [Food safety inspections](#) are required in schools that prepare and serve food. Contact the local health department for information on required inspections.
- If the school plans to prepare and serve food, the **approved inspection permit** must be received by the NPS Team in time to complete the remaining steps of the school approval process and meet the final school approval deadline. Obtaining permits is **not** the final step.
- **Ensure teachers and staff are hired and have received fingerprint or social security number based criminal history record checks.**
 - The checks must also include a check of the [Tennessee Sex Offender Registry](#), [National Sex Offender Registry](#), and the [Tennessee Department of Health Abuse Registry](#). To access information on how to obtain fingerprint-based checks, visit [TBI's Background Checks webpage](#).
 - A public search of [TNCompass](#) must be conducted by school administrators to determine if an applicant has had a Tennessee educator license suspended or revoked for misconduct.
- **Submit requested documentation for review by July 1.**
 - Check email regularly and respond timely to requests from the NPS Team.
 - School candidates that have not submitted all requested documents by the July 1 deadline will be moved to inactive status and may reapply the following school year.
 - School candidates that have submitted all documents except fire safety or food safety inspection permits by the July 1 deadline may be eligible to continue with the approval process if they are in the final stages of receiving the approved permits. The NPS Team reserves the right to identify school candidates that have demonstrated a good faith effort to complete the inspection process timely and appear to be on track to meet final deadlines for school approval.
- **Participate in a pre-operational school site visit and interview at least 10 business days before the final approval due date.**
 - Upon receipt of all requested documents and approved inspection permits, the NPS Team will contact the school candidate to schedule the pre-operational site visit and interview. Some interviews may be held virtually.
 - Schools must be set up and ready to serve students for this step of the process.
- **Address findings by the established deadline listed in the findings report. School candidates must receive the school approval letter by August 1 or 14 calendar days before the scheduled first day of school, whichever comes first.**
 - The NPS Team issues the findings report to the school candidate within three days of the pre-operational interview.
 - Final approval will not be granted until all findings have been addressed.
 - School candidates that are unable to be approved by **August 1 or 14 calendars before the scheduled first day of school**, whichever comes first, will be moved to inactive status and may reapply the following year.

Due Date Summary	
Initial Application	May 15
Fire Safety Inspection Request	May 15
Requested Documents and Permits	July 1
Pre-Operational Site Visit and Interview	At least 10 business days before final approval due date
Final Approval - School Approval Letter	August 1 or 14 calendar days before the scheduled first day of school, whichever comes first