

Non-Public Schools Category Descriptions Grades K-12

To comply with the compulsory attendance law, Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3001(c)(1), parents or legal guardians wanting to educate their school age child(ren) in a private or church-related school must ensure the selected school is approved under one of the following categories.

Access the current State Board of Education Rules for the administration and approval of non-public schools [here](#) and [here](#).

Category I & I-Special Purpose

Schools in Category I are approved through direct application to the Tennessee Department of Education during the open application window each year from January through May. Schools that provide education to students receiving short-term medical or transient care are classified under this category as Category I-Special Purpose (SP) schools.

Quick facts about this category:

- All teachers must hold an active teaching license in Tennessee and be appropriately endorsed for the assigned content area(s). Licensed teachers at Category I schools receive credit for years of service and must be evaluated annually.
- At a minimum, Category I schools must offer an instructional program that includes English language arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies, and science.
- Students in 3rd through 11th grades are assessed annually using a nationally standardized achievement test in ELA and mathematics. The results of the assessment must be shared with parents and teachers and kept as part of the student's permanent record.
- Students must earn a minimum of 22 credits for high school graduation, with a minimum of four (4) credits each in ELA and mathematics and three (3) credits each in science and social studies.
- Category I schools must ensure that class sizes do not exceed the class size maximums set forth in state law.
- Category I-SP schools must comply with additional criteria specific to their type of educational program.
- Students transferring from a Category I or I-SP school to a public school or another Category I, II, or III private school will be granted credit for completed work with a certified transcript.

Category II

Schools in Category II are approved through accreditation by one of the accrediting agencies authorized by the State Board of Education for a period of five (5) years. Authorized agencies are listed in [Tennessee State Board of Education Policy 3.500](#).

Quick facts about this category:

- The Tennessee Department of Education reviews agency applications every five years and recommends eligible agencies for approval to the State Board of Education.

- Agencies implement regular accreditation cycles for approved schools to verify ongoing compliance with accreditation requirements.
- Requirements for teacher credentialing are determined by the accrediting agency.
- At a minimum, Category II schools must offer an instructional program that includes English language arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies, and science.
- Students in 3rd through 11th grades are assessed annually using a nationally standardized achievement test in ELA and mathematics. The results of the assessment must be shared with parents and teachers and kept as part of the student's permanent record.
- Students must earn a minimum of 22 credits for high school graduation with a minimum of four (4) credits each in ELA and mathematics and three (3) credits each in science and social studies.
- Category II schools must ensure that class sizes do not exceed the class size maximums set forth in state law.
- Students transferring from a Category II school to a public school or another Category I, II, or III private school will be granted credit for completed work with a certified transcript.

Category III

Schools in Category III are approved through accreditation by one of the accrediting agencies authorized by the State Board of Education as a regional accreditor. Authorized agencies are listed in [Tennessee State Board of Education Policy 3.500](#).

Quick facts about this category:

- Agencies implement regular accreditation cycles for approved schools to verify ongoing compliance with accreditation requirements.
- Requirements for teacher credentialing are determined by the accrediting agency.
- At a minimum, Category III schools must offer an instructional program that includes English language arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies, and science.
- Students in 3rd through 11th grades are assessed annually using a nationally standardized achievement test in ELA and mathematics. The results of the assessment must be shared with parents and teachers and kept as part of the student's permanent record.
- Students must earn a minimum of 22 credits for high school graduation with a minimum of four (4) credits each in ELA and mathematics and three (3) credits each in science and social studies.
- Category III schools must ensure that class sizes do not exceed the class size maximums set forth in state law.
- Students transferring from a Category III school to a public school or another Category I, II, or III private school will be granted credit for completed work with a certified transcript.

Category IV

Schools in Category IV are approved through membership in an agency identified in Tennessee state law (Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-50-801) or through direct application to the State Board of Education.

Quick facts about this category:

- Church-related schools are exempt from certain regulations regarding faculty, textbooks, and curriculum.

- Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(a)(2)-(a)(3), church-related schools in this category may operate an umbrella program that allows parents or legal guardians to participate as a parent-teacher to home school their children.
- Students transferring from a Category IV school to a public school or another private school may be subject to placement testing.

Category V

Schools in Category V are approved through direct application to the Tennessee Department of Education during the open application window each year from January through May.

Quick facts about this category:

- Teachers must possess at least a bachelor's degree.
- Students in 3rd through 11th grades are assessed annually using a nationally standardized achievement test in ELA and mathematics. The results of the assessment must be shared with parents and teachers and kept on file for at least one calendar year.
- Schools must keep on file the curriculum offered and make copies available for inspection by the department and the public upon request.
- Students transferring from a Category V school to a public school or another private school may be subject to placement testing.

In addition, all categories of non-public schools must:

- complete a criminal history record check for all teachers and staff with proximity to children;
- have an enrollment of at least ten (10) school age children (except Category IV);
- report the names, ages, and addresses of enrolled students to the public school district annually;
- ensure children entering kindergarten are five years of age by August 15 unless the principal finds through evaluation and testing that a child who turns five by September 30 is ready to begin kindergarten;
- ensure the school's operating schedule includes 180 instructional days at 6.5 hours per day; and
- follow all applicable rules and laws regarding health and safety.