

Public and Private School Accreditation and Approval FAQ

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1. What is the role of the State Board of Education (SBE) in accreditation and approval?

SBE annually:

Reviews every public school district's kindergarten through twelfth grade program to determine compliance with basic education program approval requirements (WAC 180-16-195).

Approves private schools to ensure that they meet the minimum requirements to ensure health and safety and a sufficient basic education to meet graduation requirements (RCW 28A.195.010).

SBE establishes accreditation procedures and recognizes accrediting bodies for approved private schools.

2. What is accreditation?

Accreditation is a voluntary process for granting public recognition to institutions that meet external standards of quality.

3. Does Washington require schools to be accredited?

Schools can choose whether to seek accreditation. State law does not require public **or** private schools in Washington to be accredited.

4. What is approval?

Approval is a mandatory quality assurance process to confirm that a school/district is meeting the basic education requirements of the state. State law requires all schools in Washington to be approved in order to provide education. Schools must be approved **before** they can seek accreditation.

5. How does accreditation differ from approval?

Approval is mandatory; accreditation is voluntary.

6. What does approval mean for public schools?

Public school districts must document annually that they meet the minimum requirements for total instructional hour offerings, 180-day school year, and the state-mandated graduation requirements. This documentation is called Basic Education Act compliance.

7. What does approval mean for private schools?

Private schools must document annually that they meet minimum requirements for health and safety, total instructional hours, certified teachers, 180-day school year, curriculum that includes instruction in designated basic skills in sufficient units to meet State Board of Education graduation requirements, and administrative policies. Private school approval procedures are detailed here.

Students who attend Washington private schools that are **not** approved are considered truant, unless the student is also receiving home-based instruction according to RCW 28A.150.200 and 28A.225.010, and/or is attending an approved private school, and/or is attending a public school.

8. Who accredits Washington schools?

Washington schools typically seek accreditation through the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), Educational Service Districts (ESDs), or other recognized accrediting bodies.

Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC). NWAC represents the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington and is one of six regional accrediting associations recognized by the United States Department of Education that accredits both public and private schools. NWAC accredits distance education, elementary, foreign nation, high, K-12, middle level, postsecondary non degree granting, residential, special purpose, supplementary education, and travel education schools.

Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD). The State's nine ESDs, through their association, have designed a collaborative and reflective accreditation process relevant to the school that combines both internal and external appraisal of the school's school improvement planning activities and of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) itself.

The process requires schools to conduct an in depth self-evaluation of their SIP and a companion evaluation of the school improvement planning process used to develop the plan. An ESD accreditation process team then conducts a review and schedules a one-day visit to verify understandings of the SIP and the planning process.

For more information regarding accreditation please contact the ESD contacts listed below:

ESD Contact	ESD	Phone #	Email Address
Helene Paroff	101	509-789-3538	hparoff@esd101.net
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9. What other accrediting bodies has the State Board of Education recognized for private schools?

SBE has recognized the accrediting bodies in the following table.

SBE Recognized Accrediting Bodies for Private Schools		
ACSI	Association of Christian Schools International	Accredits Nationally
AMS	American Montessori Society	Accredits Nationally
AWSNA	Association of Waldorf Schools of North America	Accredits Nationally
CSI	Christian Schools International	Accredits Nationally
NLSA	National Lutheran School Accreditation	Accredits Nationally
PNAIS	Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools	Accredits Regionally
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist	Accredits Nationally and Regionally
WCEA	Western Catholic Education Association	Accredits Regionally