

# Establishing an independent (private) school

## Application process and requirements

### Background

The Government of Alberta is committed to offering a number of education options that allow parents to select the path they feel will best help their children reach their full potential, including independent schools.

### Application process

The application process and requirements for those who wish to establish an independent school in Alberta are as follows:

**1. Determine the [type of independent school](#) to be established and the [programs to be offered](#).**

Section 29 of the [Education Act](#) authorizes two types of [independent schools](#) to operate in Alberta: registered and accredited.

**2. Request an application package from Alberta Education.**

Contact School Accreditation, Monitoring and Print Services (SAMPS) at 780-427-7235 (toll-free by first dialing 310-0000 within Alberta) or [edc.privateschools@gov.ab.ca](mailto:edc.privateschools@gov.ab.ca) to request an application to establish an independent school. An application form, supporting documents and additional information will be provided.

**3. Contact Alberta Education for support in completing the application.**

**4. Submit a draft application before the October 31 deadline. (Optional)**

Applicants may submit a draft application to Alberta Education for review and feedback regarding the clarity and completeness of the information provided. A draft application that meets all requirements may be considered a final application and advanced to the next stage in the application process.

**5. Submit a final application and required documents by the October 31 deadline.**

Alberta Education accepts and reviews applications throughout the year, however, the deadline for submitting a final application to operate in the upcoming school year is October 31. Applications received after the deadline will be considered for the following school year. Applications may be deemed unsuccessful at this stage and, if so, do not continue to the next stage.

**6. Participate in an interview with Alberta Education staff. (Alberta Education may waive this step for existing independent school authorities whose applications meet all requirements).**

**7. Receive a decision by the Minister of Education (or delegate) if the independent school is approved to operate.**

### Types of independent schools in Alberta

**Registered independent schools**, defined under Section 29(1) of the [Education Act](#), must meet the requirements in the [Private Schools Regulation](#). Registered independent schools are not eligible for Alberta Education funding.

**Accredited independent schools**, defined under Section 29(2) of the [Education Act](#), must continue to meet the requirements of a registered independent school. Those applying to become an accredited independent school must meet additional requirements as stated in the [Education Act](#) and the [Private Schools Regulation](#).

## Funding

The operator of an accredited independent school is eligible to receive a grant in respect of that school if;

- For at least one year immediately preceding the grant application, the operator and independent school have been operating in compliance with all applicable legislative requirements.

A funded independent school operator applying to expand (additional schools) is eligible to receive a grant in respect of that school if;

- For at least one year immediately preceding the grant application, the operator and its existing funded schools have been operating in compliance with all applicable legislative requirements.

Refer to the most recent [Funding Manual for School Authorities](#) for details on applicable funding rates.

### Quick reference summary of requirements for registered, accredited and accredited, funded (eligible to receive a grant) schools.

Quick reference	Registered	Accredited	Accredited, funded (Eligible to receive a grant)
Must provide the Alberta programs of study.	✘	✘	✔
Must use the provincial assessments under programs established by the Minister.	✘	✔	✔
Must employ as a teacher only an individual who holds a certificate issued under the <i>Certification of Teachers and Teacher Leaders Regulation</i> .	✘	✔	✔
Must designate an individual who holds a leadership certificate issued under the <i>Certification of Teachers and Teacher Leaders Regulation</i> to act as the principal of the school.	✘	✘	✔

See the [Requirements for establishing an independent school](#) chart, located on the following pages for more information regarding registered and accredited independent schools.

**Heritage language schools** are accredited independent schools that offer approved or authorized language and culture courses at the high school level outside of regular school hours. A heritage language school may be funded or non-funded. If funded, an individual who holds a leadership certificate issued under the [Certification of Teachers and Teacher Leaders Regulation](#) must be designated as the principal.

**Designated special education private schools (DSEPS)** are accredited independent schools that have been given special approval and funding by the Minister, where the sole purpose of the school is to serve students who are identified with a mild, moderate or severe disability.

The operator of an accredited, funded independent school wishing to have it designated as a DSEPS in the upcoming school year must submit an application to Alberta Education by October 31 for approval by the Minister.

**Collegiate schools**, in partnership with post-secondary institutions, offer specialized programming in a particular subject or field and provide all students with a clear pathway into post-secondary education and careers in their chosen field and are given special approval and startup funding, if applicable, by the Minister of Education.

Those applying to operate an accredited, funded independent school may complete and submit an application for collegiate school status simultaneously with the accredited, funded independent school application, however, approval of the school application does not guarantee approval of the collegiate school status application. More information on the collegiate school status application process and requirements can be found at the [collegiate schools website](#).

## Facilities

Independent schools must be operated in facilities that comply with all applicable municipal and provincial public health, safety, fire and building standards.

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## Programming considerations

The educational programming offered by all independent schools must be consistent with the [Ministerial Order on Student Learning](#).

An **education program** consistent with the [Requirements for Special Education in Accredited-Funded Private Schools](#) must be offered to any student requiring specialized supports and services that an accredited, funded independent school enrolls.

An **early childhood services (ECS) program** may be offered by an accredited independent school that is eligible for funding. The accredited independent school operator must apply to commence an ECS program and meet the requirements set out in the [Early Childhood Services Regulation](#), including offering a program that complies with the [Ministerial Order on Student Learning](#). Funding for ECS is available from the first year of operation.

School authorities that provide an ECS program must provide children with a minimum of 475 hours of instruction during a school year. For children with severe disabilities or moderate or severe language delay, ECS operators may operate a full day educational program, totaling access to a minimum of 800 hours of teacher-directed instruction per year, and/or a half-day educational program, totaling access to a minimum of hours of teacher-directed instruction per year, as follows:

- a. children 2 years, 8 months to 3 years, 7 months – minimum of 300 hours;
- b. children 3 years, 8 months to 4 years, 7 months – minimum of 400 hours; and
- c. children 4 years, 8 months and older – minimum of 475 hours.

A **home education program**, for grade 1 to 12 students, may be supervised by an accredited, funded independent school. The parent has the primary responsibility for planning and selecting learning activities and resources as well as planning the instruction and assessment of student progress in accordance with the [Home Education Regulation](#). A certificated teacher employed by the associate independent school, together with the parent, evaluate the student's progress in meeting the learning outcomes of the home education plan.

A **shared responsibility program**, for grade 1 to 12 students, is a program where the parent providing a home education program to the student and an Alberta funded school authority agree to share responsibility for the student's education. Two conditions must be met for this to occur:

1. The school portion of the agreement must consist of a program where an Alberta certificated teacher, employed by a school board or an accredited, funded independent school, is responsible for planning, resource selection, instruction, assessment and evaluation of student progress in selected courses that follow the Alberta programs of study or locally developed courses. The school authority must be responsible for at least a minimum of 20 per cent to a maximum of 80 per cent of the student's program in grades 1 to 12.
2. The home education portion of the agreement must consist of a program developed in accordance with [Education Act](#) and the [Home Education Regulation](#).

An **online learning program** is a structured learning environment in which students engage with their teachers in one or more online courses. Alberta certificated teachers employed by the independent school are responsible for instruction. An online course is one in which the majority of instruction and assessment takes place over the Internet, using a Learning Management System (LMS). The LMS provides students with access to course content, teachers and other students. Students may access the LMS from multiple settings (in school and/or out of school buildings) and engage in both synchronous and asynchronous instruction.

## Fees

Independent schools may charge instructional and non-instructional fees for programming in Grades 1 to 12. Independent schools that offer ECS programs may charge reasonable instructional fees for hours of instruction beyond 475 hours and non-instructional fees to offset costs, such as supplies, snacks and field trips.

## Monitoring of independent school operators

Alberta Education monitors and evaluates independent school operators and the schools for compliance with applicable legislation, regulations, policies and standards.

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## Additional resources

Interested applicants may contact the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA) at 780-469-9868 or [office@aisca.ab.ca](mailto:office@aisca.ab.ca) for additional assistance in completing the application.

## Contact information

Questions regarding the independent school application process and requirements can be directed to SAMPS at [edc.privateschools@gov.ab.ca](mailto:edc.privateschools@gov.ab.ca) or 780-427-7235 (toll-free by first dialing 310-0000 within Alberta).

Requirements for establishing an independent school	Registered	Accredited
The independent school operator is responsible to the Minister of Education for meeting the requirements in provincial legislation, regulations and policies as set out in this chart.		
The independent school operator provides parents or prospective students with written notice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) that a student who attends the registered independent school may not necessarily be placed at the same grade level if the student registers in another school;</li> <li>b) that the registered independent school cannot grant credit for senior high school courses taken at the school;</li> <li>c) of the operator's general liability insurance coverage for accidents and deaths; and</li> <li>d) of the qualifications of the members of the instructional staff.</li> </ul>	✓	✗
The independent school operator ensures that the students enrolled in the school have the opportunity to write the applicable provincial assessments under programs established by the Minister.	✓	✗
The independent school operator provides educational programs to its students that comply with the <a href="#">Ministerial Order on Student Learning</a> .	✓	✓
The independent school operator ensures students will achieve educational progress acceptable to the Minister.	✓	✓
The independent school operator agrees to regular evaluation and monitoring by the Minister.	✓	✓
The independent school operator provides proof that the building to be used by the school complies with municipal zoning bylaws and applicable municipal and provincial public health, safety, fire and building standards.	✓	✓
The independent school operator maintains individual student records consistent with the <a href="#">Student Record Regulation</a> .	✓	✓
The independent school operator makes rules for the discipline of students and for the suspension and expulsion of students that incorporate the principles of fundamental justice and provides copies to the students and their parents.	✓	✓
The independent school operator submits to the Minister an annual operating plan (AOP) by May 15 preceding the school year for which the plan is to have effect.	✓	✓
The independent school operator ensures that the financial situation of the school does not place the learning environment of the students at risk.	✓	✓
The independent school operator offers education programs and programs of study to its students that are approved by the Minister.	✗	✓
The independent school operator has the capacity, in accordance with the regulations, to deliver an appropriate educational program to its students.	✗	✓
The independent school operator develops and maintains policies for the assessment of students; teacher supervision, evaluation and professional growth; safety for outdoor education and field trips; and a health protocol.	✗	✓

<b>Requirements for establishing an independent school</b>	<b>Registered</b>	<b>Accredited</b>
The independent school operator is responsible to the Minister of Education for meeting the requirements in provincial legislation, regulations and policies as set out in this chart.		
The independent school operator employs teachers with valid Alberta teaching certificates issued in accordance with the <a href="#">Certification of Teachers and Teacher Leaders Regulation</a> .	✘	✔
The independent school operator may employ a competent individual to teach a language, culture or religion under the supervision of a teacher holding a valid Alberta teaching certificate.	✘	✔
The independent school operator uses the provincial assessments under programs established by the Minister.	✘	✔
The independent school operator provides students in Grades 1 through 9 access to a minimum of 950 hours of instruction and students in Grades 10 through 12 access to a minimum of 1,000 hours of instruction during the school year.	✘	✔
The independent school operator ensures that students enrolled in the school have the opportunity to meet the requirements for high school completion.	✘	✔
The independent school operator provides a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects dignity and fosters a sense of belonging for students and staff.	✘	✔

<b>Additional requirements to be accredited, funded (eligible to receive a grant)</b>	<b>Registered</b>	<b>Accredited</b>
The independent school operator is incorporated as a society under the <a href="#">Societies Act</a> , or as a non-profit company under Part 9 of the <a href="#">Companies Act</a> , or operates under a special act of the legislature.	✘	✔
The independent school operator appoints a secretary and a treasurer, or a secretary-treasurer who is not the operator nor the chair or president of the governing body of the school and shall provide their contact information to the Minister.	✘	✔
The independent school operator appoints a professional accounting firm authorized under the <a href="#">Chartered Professional Accountants Act</a> to perform an audit engagement and shall provide its contact information to the Minister.	✘	✔
The independent school operator is eligible to receive a grant in respect of that school if, for at least one year immediately preceding the grant application, the operator and accredited independent school have been operating in compliance with all applicable legislative requirements.	✘	✔
The funded independent school operator applying to expand (additional schools) is eligible to receive a grant in respect of that school if; for at least one year immediately preceding the grant application, the operator and its existing funded schools have been operating in compliance with all applicable legislative requirements.	✘	✔
The independent school operator establishes a parent advisory council if the parents of students enrolled in the school do not constitute a majority of the members of the governing body of the school.	✘	✔
The independent school operator designates a principal who holds a leadership certificate issued under the <a href="#">Certification of Teachers and Teacher Leaders Regulation</a> and who is not the operator of the school or a voting member of the governing body of the school.	✘	✔
The independent school operator follows the requirements for teaching the <a href="#">Alberta programs of study</a> .	✘	✔

Additional requirements to be accredited, funded (eligible to receive a grant)	Registered	Accredited
The independent school operator prepares an education plan and annual education results report as required by the Minister.	x	✓
The independent school operator is, if a student is expelled, responsible for the student's education program and ensures that the student continues to have access to an education program for the remainder of the school year.	x	✓
The independent school operator annually submits to the Minister, on or before May 31, a budget of the operator in respect of the funded independent school for the fiscal year starting on September 1 following that date.	x	✓
The independent school operator annually submits to the Minister, on or before November 30, audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending on August 31 preceding that date, including an auditor's report, copies of any written communications between the auditor and the operator respecting the operator's internal controls and accounting procedures and an audited statement of operations accounting with respect to all grants received by the operator under the <a href="#">Ministerial Grants Regulation</a> in respect of all funded independent schools operated by the operator. <b>Effective September 1, 2023, the audited statement of operations accounting with respect to all grants received by the operator must be made publicly available.</b> A funded independent school will be required to provide information to parents of enrolled students regarding the audited financial statements and compensation information for senior management employees upon request.	x	✓
The independent school operator keeps in force a blanket fidelity bond covering the operator and employees of the school while carrying out duties relating to any money or security belonging to or held by the school. The amount of the bond shall be the lesser of \$50,000 or 40 per cent of the operator's provincial funding plus any surplus from the previous operational year.	x	✓
The independent school operator keeps in force, and provides the Minister on request with evidence of the existence of, a general liability insurance policy or other form of indemnification in an amount that is not less than \$2,000,000 for each occurrence of loss or damage resulting from bodily injury to or death of one or more persons, and for loss or damage to property, regardless of the number of claims arising from any one occurrence.	x	✓
<b>Effective September 1, 2024</b> , the governing body of a funded independent school shall develop, maintain and review policies consistent with the Minister's policies with respect to: internal controls (including segregation of duties, capital assets, reimbursements of expenses and investments), roles and responsibilities of the governing body, roles and responsibilities of senior managers, conflicts of interest and matters relating to the compensation of senior managers of the funded independent school. These policies must be made publicly available.	x	✓