

New law requires Hawaii's private schools to be licensed or accredited

By [Susan Essoyan](#) · Today · Updated 10:21 p.m.

All private schools in Hawaii will need to be licensed or accredited by July 1, and students attending schools that do not comply will be considered truant under a bill signed by Gov. David Ige.

The Hawaii Association of Independent Schools is reaching out to small schools it knows lack licenses or accreditation and also wants to alert others that may be operating under the radar.

“The number of schools that we see that are neither accredited nor licensed is only about seven or eight, but there are schools that we’re not even aware of,” said Philip Bossert, executive director of the association.

“Basically, the new law says that if you are not accredited or licensed, then your students are truant,” he said. “Parents need to understand that and ask the question, are you licensed, before they put their kids in there. We are trying to spread the word.”

The Hawaii Association of Independent Schools worked for three years to get a bill through the Legislature in hopes of ensuring that all private schools meet basic health, safety and educational standards and are financially viable. [Senate Bill 980, HD 1, CD 1](#), introduced by Senate Education Chairwoman Michelle Kidani, was signed into law July 2 and became Act 227.

The Hawaii Council of Private Schools, a subsidiary of the association, is responsible for licensing for-profit and nonprofit private schools in the state.

Numbers compiled by the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools for the 2018-19 academic year estimate that 2.6% of students statewide are home-schooled, 15.8% attend private school and 81.6% attend public schools — including the 5.2% who choose public charter schools.

Parents who opt to [home-school](#) their children must notify the principal of their neighborhood public school in writing of their intent to do so.

The new law defines a private school as “an educational institution that teaches students in any grade from kindergarten through grade 12 and that is licensed or accredited by the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools, Hawaii Council of Private Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Western Catholic Educational Association, Association of Christian Schools International, or a similarly recognized entity that meets or exceeds the standards set by the aforementioned entities.”

All 101 member schools of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools are licensed, and many are also accredited by HAIS and or WASC. Another five schools are licensed by the Hawaii Council for Private Schools but are not HAIS members.

Michael Rockers, superintendent of Hawaii Catholic Schools, initially opposed the bill but ultimately supported the version that passed.

“I appreciate the Legislature and H AIS working with my office and just being sensitive to some of our concerns,” he said. “I think the final bill provides an appropriate measure of oversight and supports the quality of nonpublic schools, and so we’re glad about that. It also is sensitive to our accreditation model and our schools’ role as a ministry of the church.”

All of Hawaii’s Catholic elementary and secondary schools are accredited by WASC and the Western Catholic Educational Association.

Businesses in Hawaii, including private schools, must also register with the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, but the agency has no oversight over K-12 private schools.

The state Department of Education used to license private schools but in 1996 transferred that responsibility to the Hawaii Council of Private Schools. At that point, licensing became optional, although Kidani has said that was not the intent.

The checklist to receive a license includes requirements in safety, health, facilities, governance, faculty, admissions, finances and a viable educational program.

The Hawaii Council of Private Schools charges \$250 a year for licensing.