Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Educator Effectiveness
Nonpublic School Approval Branch
200 W. Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 767-0407

Fact Sheet Regarding Maryland Church-Exempt Schools

1. What is meant by the term "church-exempt" school?

Maryland law, Education Article, §2-206, Annotated Code of Maryland, exempts nonpublic schools that are governed and operated by a bona fide church organization from holding a Certificate of Approval from the State Board of Education. This means that a church-operated school is not required to meet the educational standards that have been established by the Maryland State Board of Education for nonpublic schools under COMAR 13A.09.09. "Church-exempt" schools must, however, register their operation with the Nonpublic School Approval Branch of the Maryland State Department of Education.

2. Is a church-exempt school required to comply with any approval or licensure requirements?

Yes. A church-exempt school is exempt only from education regulations. A church-exempt school, therefore, is not exempt from other applicable local, State, and/or Federal approval or licensure requirements such as zoning ordinances, health department regulations, fire safety regulations, asbestos regulations, criminal background checks, child abuse and neglect reporting law, and child care licensing requirements.

3. What educational standards must a church-exempt school meet?

A church-exempt school operates its educational program in accordance with standards that are established by the governing church.

4. Are schools that are approved by the State Board of Education better than church-exempt schools?

Whether a nonpublic school is approved by the State Board of Education or is registered as a church-exempt school is not indicative of the quality of the educational program

offered by the school. An approved nonpublic school has been granted a Certificate of Approval from the State Board of Education based on demonstration of compliance with standards established by the State Board of Education. Approved nonpublic schools and church-exempt schools may establish standards for their operations which exceed those that have been established by the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education sets no standards for church-exempt schools.

5. Will a child's education from a church-exempt school be accepted by an approved nonpublic school, a public school system, or colleges and universities?

It is important for parents to pursue this question with administrators of schools, colleges, and universities they anticipate their child may attend after attending a church-exempt school. Admission policies for schools, colleges, and universities vary widely. Maryland law states that a local public school system may determine through an evaluation of the student whether credits earned at a "nonaccredited" high school will be accepted at the public high school to which the student transfers. Such evaluation may include the administration of tests and examinations; the use of interviews; and the inspection of transcripts, report cards, and other documentation. The law further states that the student will be notified in writing of the reasons for any failure to transfer credits from nonaccredited schools.

6. If an individual is dissatisfied with a church-exempt school, to whom may the individual register the concern or complaint?

Any concern or complaint regarding the educational program of a church-exempt school may be addressed to the teacher, administration, or governing board of the church-exempt school. The State Department of Education has no jurisdiction in the resolution of a complaint regarding the educational program of church-exempt schools because church-exempt schools are not subject to the educational requirements of the State Board of Education.

Concerns or complaints regarding the facility in which a church-exempt school is housed may be directed to the county health department, the local zoning agency, or the fire marshal's office, as appropriate. Concerns regarding child care operations and/or the welfare of children 4-years-old or younger at church-exempt schools should be directed to the local Office of Child Care. Concerns regarding child abuse or neglect should be directed to the local Department of Social Services or the police department.

7. Where can an individual call with additional questions regarding church-exempt schools?

Additional questions regarding church-exempt schools may be directed to the Nonpublic School Approval Branch of the Maryland State Department of Education in Baltimore by calling (410) 767-0407.

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