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## PRIVATE SCHOOL REGULATIONS INCREASE

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Many private schools are subject to government curriculum, testing, teacher certification, employment, and financial regulations, which have recently increased under ObamaCare.

“We’re not afraid of accountability—our schools should have higher-level learning than Common Core [national K-12] standards,” said Tom Cathey, legal director for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), the largest private accreditation agency. “We’re just opposed to regulations that infringe upon who you can hire and what you can teach.”

More than five million American K-12 students attend private schools. They attain higher test scores than their public-school peers in all subjects, according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress.

“Private schools are the most accountable schools in the country,” Joe McTighe, executive director of the Council for American Private Education. “There are free-market forces at play in our schools that ensure a level of quality control [which is] immediate, effective, decisive, and unforgiving. If a private school doesn’t deliver what parents want, they take their business someplace else. That’s accountability.”

### **Growing Federal Infringement**

Most state regulations concern private schools less than recent federal infringements, Cathey said.

“One of the biggest issues we have now is with healthcare requirements,” Cathey said. “We are very much opposed to [life-ending drugs]...to force our employees to pay for that is an infringement upon religion.”

“Right now, we can hire people who we want at Christian schools,” Cathey said. “[The federal government] would like to remove that exemption and we’d lose our whole mission.”

### **Accreditation vs. Accountability**

Most private schools choose to be accredited either through their state or a private organization, as this typically gives them the power to grant a recognized high school diploma, meet compulsory attendance mandates, and give classes that transfer. Nearly all states require private schools to register or be state-licensed.

While the state is still considered the ultimate accrediting body, private agencies believe their peer accountability, comprehensive review, and knowledge of local communities trump state standards, McTighe said.

“Most accredited private schools are accredited by agencies other than the state,” he said. “The process takes a comprehensive look at the school: vision, governance, curriculum, instructional resources, teacher quality, leadership, parent involvement, student performance.”

ACSI works with all regional accreditors. The Association of Classical Christian Schools accredits schools in Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Virginia, and also works with regional associations that protect private school rights, said Patch Blakey, ACCS’ executive director.

“It’s great to have a peer council review you rather than the government,” Blakey said. “We’re part of a peer organization that holds us mutually accountable...if one organization has low standards it reflects poorly on the whole mission.”

While higher education accreditation teems with complaints, there are fewer from K-12 schools, said Cato Institute scholar Neal McCluskey: “I suspect most schools find it to have some positive benefit. The main complaint in higher education is accreditors tend to ask for a lot of brick and mortar-type things that don’t make a lot of sense anymore.”

### **Teacher Certification**

Though most states recognize ACSI teacher certification, many schools also want to obtain regional accreditation so have their teachers become state certified, Cathey said.

State certification processes ask teachers to do the opposite of what most classical schools want, Blakey said: “If a state would require us to follow state standards that wouldn’t serve us at all, that are inconsistent with the way we train our teachers and the way we want our teachers to teach, it is an unnecessary expenditure.”

Low state standards should not ban a person passionate and educated in a subject from the classroom, he said.

“There’s pretty broad recognition that the [state] certification process is a barrier to entry to a lot of people who could very well be good teachers,” McCluskey said.

### **Curriculum, Testing**

State standards pushing a more progressive form of education over an “older, reliable, historically proven,” curriculum concern ACCS, Blakey said.

“A local, private school ought to be able to identify a curriculum that’s best for their students,” he said.

Standardized testing is not commonly required of private schools, but most administer them to gauge student progress and performance.

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