

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Hawaii

Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.



Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Hawaii.

This guide profiles **Hawaii's** education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN HAWAII

Hawaii's public education system is unlike any other in the country: it is the only single statewide school district in the United States. The Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) functions both as the school district and as the state education agency — directly overseeing all ~258 public schools (plus about 40 public charter...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 5 (by July 31)
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 18 (or high school completion)
- ✓ **District** — One statewide district (HIDOE)
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, charter, private, or homeschool

PRE-K AND READY KEIKI

Hawaii is rapidly expanding public prekindergarten . The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) runs public pre-K classrooms in HIDOE schools, and the state's "Ready Keiki" initiative aims to reach universal access to pre-K by 2032 , opening new classrooms across the islands. Hawaii also has Head Start and a strong tradition of...



AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 5–18
Districts	1 statewide
Testing	Smarter Balanced
Diploma	24 credits
Choice	Charters / GE

THE SINGLE STATEWIDE DISTRICT

Because Hawaii has one statewide district, there are no local school boards or district boundaries in the mainland sense — HIDOE assigns students to a home (geographic) school based on address, within a structure of 7 districts and 15 complex areas (a "complex" is a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools). The largest...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN HAWAII

- ✓ **Kamehameha Schools** — A large, exceptionally well-endowed private school system (funded by the Bishop Estate) that gives preference to students of Native Hawaiian ancestry...
- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as Punahou School, 'Iolani School, Mid-Pacific Institute, and the boarding Hawaii Preparatory Academy (Big...
- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — Diocese of Honolulu schools (such as Saint Louis School and Maryknoll)
- ✓ **Other religious & specialty schools** — Christian, Montessori, and Hawaiian-focused programs

READ HAWAII'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Hawaii uses the Smarter Balanced Assessment for ELA and math in grades 3–8 and grade 11, plus the HSA-Science test. Run by the Hawaii Department of Education (the state's single statewide district). There's no exit-exam gate.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **Smarter Balanced — ELA & Math** — Grades 3–8 and grade 11 (computer-adaptive with a performance task)
- ✓ **HSA-Science** — Science in grades 5, 8, and once in high school
- ✓ **HSA-Alt** — Alternate assessment for eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

Smarter Balanced is computer-adaptive with a performance task; the science test is computer-based.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. Hawaii doesn't require passing a state test to graduate; students complete the state's course and credit requirements (Board of Education diploma requirements).

HOW IT'S SCORED

Smarter Balanced reports four levels (Level 3+ meets standard); the science test reports achievement levels.

AT A GLANCE

ELA/Math	Smarter Balanced
Grades	3–8 and 11
Science	HSA-Science gr 5, 8, HS
Grad requirement?	No exit-exam gate
Format	Computer-adaptive
Standards	Hawaii Common Core

TESTING WINDOWS

Testing runs in a spring window set statewide.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Practice & training tests** — The state provides free practice tests for the computer-adaptive format
- ✓ **Apply skills** — Smarter Balanced rewards reasoning across standards

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate. Ask your school about make-up windows.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ HAWAII'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Hawaii is a single statewide school district (HIDOE), so graduation requirements are uniform: 24 credits with no exit exam . Students complete a senior project and a Personal Transition Plan , and can earn diploma honors .

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Hawaii's 24 credits include 4 English, 4 math (including Algebra II), 4 science, 4 social studies, 1 world language/fine arts/CTE, 1 PE, 0.5 health, and electives (with a senior project). Because it's one district, this applies statewide.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No exit exam. Hawaii students take state assessments, but a passing score is not required to graduate.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Hawaii offers the standard Board of Education Recognition Diploma plus Academic Honors, CTE Honors, and STEM Honors designations, and the Seal of Biliteracy .

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Students complete a senior project and a Personal Transition Plan ; early college and CTE offer accelerated routes.



AT A GLANCE

System	Single statewide district (HIDOE...)
Credits	24
Exit exam?	No
Honors	Academic, CTE & STEM Honors
Also	Senior project; transition plan

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does Hawaii require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does Hawaii require a test to graduate?** — No — Hawaii has no exit exam; a passing test score is not required to graduate.
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ HAWAII'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Hawaii — a single statewide district — rates schools with the Strive HI Performance System , which produces an index score and classifications rather than a letter grade or stars.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

Strive HI combines achievement, growth, graduation, chronic absenteeism, science, and readiness into an index , and classifies schools (e.g., for recognition or support) under ESSA. Read the index components and any classification together.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- ✓ **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- ✓ **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- ✓ **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- ✓ **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- ✓ **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the Hawaii DOE / Strive HI reports (hawaiipublicschools.org). Review the Strive HI components (especially growth) and the trend.

AT A GLANCE

Format	Strive HI (index + classificatio...
System	Strive HI Performance System
Statewide	Single district (HIDOE)
Look up at	hawaiipublicschools.org

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- ✓ **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- ✓ **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- ✓ **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- ✓ **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- ✓ **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does Hawaii rate schools?** — Hawaii uses the Strive HI Performance System (an index plus classifications) — not a letter grade or stars.
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ HAWAII'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Hawaii — a single statewide school district — does not have a private-school-choice program (no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship). It offers public choice through charter schools and a geographic exception process (limited transfers between public schools).

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in Hawaii. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available). Within the public system, charter schools and geographic exceptions provide options.

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- ✓ **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- ✓ **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- ✓ **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- ✓ **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

Private-choice proposals have not been enacted in Hawaii. Confirm the current status if you've heard of a new proposal.

AT A GLANCE

Private choice?	No statewide program
System	Single statewide district
Public choice	Charters & geographic exceptions
Homeschool	Legal (with notice)
Confirm with	HIDOE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does Hawaii have a private-school-choice program?** — No — Hawaii has no private program, but offers charters and public geographic exceptions.
- ✓ **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- ✓ **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- ✓ **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ HAWAII'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Hawaii licenses teachers through the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams, and earn a license (Provisional, advancing to Standard/Advanced).

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **Praxis Core** — Basic skills — or satisfied with qualifying scores
- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your license field
- ✓ **Praxis PLT** — Principles of Learning and Teaching (pedagogy) for your grade band
- ✓ **Note** — Requirements vary by field — confirm your specific tests

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- ✓ **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- ✓ **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- ✓ **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- ✓ **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- ✓ **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- ✓ **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency



AT A GLANCE

Agency	Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (...)
Basic skills	Praxis Core (or qualifying score...)
Content & pedagogy	Praxis Subject + PLT
License	Provisional — then Standard

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Hawaii, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- ✓ **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- ✓ **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- ✓ **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Hawaii's agency and your current state

READ HAWAII'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Hawai'i's primary state aid flows through the University of Hawai'i (UH) system, including a promise program that makes community college affordable for residents with need.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- ✓ **B Plus Scholarship** — A merit scholarship for Hawai'i public-high-school graduates who meet a GPA threshold, usable in the UH system.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

The Hawai'i Promise Program is a last-dollar scholarship covering direct education costs (tuition, fees, books) not met by other aid for eligible, need-based residents at UH community colleges.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Hawai'i's HI529 (Hawai'i's College Savings Program) is the state's tax-advantaged plan.

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with University of Hawai'i System Financial Aid** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- ✓ **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- ✓ **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- ✓ **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

AT A GLANCE

Free community college

Hawai'i Promise

Merit

B Plus Scholarship

529 plan

HI529

Agency

University of Hawai'i system

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How do I get Hawaii aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; University of Hawai'i System Financial Aid administers the programs.
- ✓ **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Hawaii offers need-based and merit programs.
- ✓ **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- ✓ **Can I use it out of state?** — Most aid is for in-state schools (with exceptions); check each program.
- ✓ **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official programs only.

READ HAWAII'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



KEEP EXPLORING

Find Your Community.

One of 51 state guides in the largest education resource online. Explore **1,297 free guides** plus directories of schools, colleges & more in your community.

tools.k12academics.com →

