

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · TENNESSEE

School Enrollment in Tennessee 2026: Enrollment Is Open, the Scholarship Is Not

A number cannot be required and status cannot be asked at enrollment; the state's own documents say so in writing. A school scholarship is a separate door, and lawful presence is required there.

SHORT ANSWER

No law conditioning school enrollment on immigration status was enacted, and that was established not by assumption but by **scanning 1,142 enacted laws**. The state education department's own question and answer document answers the question of whether schools may refuse to enroll undocumented children with a single word, **No**, and names Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982). The same document states that **federal law prohibits requiring a Social Security number to enroll a child in school**. But school enrollment and a school scholarship are different things, and combining them in one sentence would make this guide wrong. **The real obstacle is not the number but proof of address.**

The state's own written answer

In the back-to-school legal guidance published by the education department, the question and answer read as follows: may schools or education agencies refuse to enroll undocumented immigrant children, **no**. The document cites the 1982 Supreme Court decision and states that schools may not deny enrollment **because of the student's or the parent's actual or perceived citizenship or immigration status**. The same paragraph goes one step further: **enrollment practices that chill or discourage participation in school on the basis of immigration status** may violate federal civil rights law.

What a school district may ask for

- **Proof of identity and age**, such as a certified birth certificate.
- Official records and transcripts from the previous school.
- **Immunization records**, or proof that immunization is not required for the child.
- **Proof of home address**. And there is a critical sentence here: school districts **may not require a specific document** and may accept proof through a variety of documents such as a utility bill, a tax statement or a rental agreement.
- The document's own warning: **districts should never simply turn a student away due to a missing document**. And further: **federal privacy law prohibits requiring a Social Security number to enroll a child in school**.

A second state document is even more explicit: a school **cannot deny enrollment based on the inability to produce Social Security cards or numbers, health forms, birth certificates or other information**; only immunization records may be required. That same text adds that if additional documentation is requested, the school must immediately state that **no documentation will be used in relation to immigration status**. If there is no birth certificate, **the school decides** what will serve as proof of birth. Students in foster care and students experiencing homelessness are enrolled **immediately**, without waiting for documents.

ENROLLMENT IS OPEN; THE SCHOLARSHIP IS NOT

- The state's education scholarship law provides that **a student who cannot establish lawful presence will have the scholarship application denied**, and it counts the scholarship as a **public benefit**.
- Being a public benefit means that the verification and reporting regime that took effect in 2026 **attaches to the scholarship application**.
- **Status is not asked and cannot be asked for enrollment; lawful presence is required for the scholarship application**. Do not confuse the two.
- **If you are considering a scholarship application, talk to an attorney before completing the form.**

What happened in the legislature

So that incomplete information does not frighten you, here is the sequence. In 2025 a bill appeared that would have given school authorities the power to **refuse to enroll or charge tuition to** a student without lawful presence, and it **did not become law**. In 2026 the bill returned with the refusal and tuition provisions removed, reshaped as a requirement to **collect status data** at enrollment, and **that did not become law either**. No such law in force was found, and the education department's written guidance from 2023 is still in place.

Districts differ; do not carry one to another

DISTRICT	PARENT IDENTIFICATION	PROOF OF ADDRESS	FAMILIES STAYING WITH RELATIVES
Nashville	Parent or guardian photo identification	Lease, mortgage statement, utility bill and similar	A separate enrollment center route for those with no proof in their own name
Hendersonville district	Driver license, state identification, passport or passport card	Two documents ; cell phone bills, bank and credit card statements are not accepted	A notarized residency affidavit
Brentwood district	Driver license, passport or passport card	The householder's document plus two separate documents belonging to the parent	A notarized residency verification affidavit , on a separate nine-item checklist
Rockvale district	Custody documentation required	Two documents, and not from the same source ; post office boxes are not accepted	No affidavit procedure was found on the page ; ask the school

DISTRICT	PARENT IDENTIFICATION	PROOF OF ADDRESS	FAMILIES STAYING WITH RELATIVES
Memphis district	The district's own page could not be reached	Research found no document list	Not found

- **A passport is accepted by name as photo identification in two districts.** For a parent without a driver license, that is a real door.
- **One district does not accept the hospital copy of a birth certificate given to the mother;** a certified copy is required.
- **One district counts a Tennessee driver license and a Tennessee vehicle registration as proof of address;** completing your license and registration file early makes school enrollment easier too.
- **The immunization certificate is required on the state's own form;** shots given in another state or abroad must be transferred onto that form. One county health department will do that transfer and send the certificate to the parent by email.

Which school you belong to is not simple everywhere

In Nashville the merger means **the entire county is a single school district**; children living in the six separate municipalities inside the county attend the same district. **Memphis is the opposite:** alongside the county district there are **six municipal school districts** that began taking students in 2014, so which district a home with a Memphis mailing address falls into **depends on the address**. In the three smaller places no separate city school district was found; all three belong to their county district. School zone lookup tools vary by district; one county district offers both a school zone map and **a bus route lookup by address**.

Language: Turkish is in none of them

DISTRICT	LANGUAGES ACTUALLY TRANSLATED
Nashville	Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, Kurdish, Nepali, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Vietnamese
Rockvale district	Spanish and Arabic, plus an interpreter line reached by calling the language center
Hendersonville district	Only the Spanish version of one health form
Brentwood district	No translated language or interpreter service was found

Turkish is on none of these lists. And a warning: the **translate menu on district websites is machine translation**, not material the agency prepared. **Do not read it as a Turkish-language service.** One district's family information center states that it can answer questions and connect you to an interpreter if needed; **there is something to request, and that is the door.** Make the request **in writing** and note who received it and when.

Enrollment day folder

WHAT TO PREPARE	NOTE
☐ Proof of address, at least two documents	One district does not accept two documents from the same source , and another rejects cell phone bills and bank statements. The documents must be in your name
☐ Notarized residency affidavit	If you are staying with relatives: two districts ask for it by name, and in one district the procedure could not be found on the page. Book the notary before enrollment day
☐ Parent identification	Two districts accept a passport by name . If you have no driver license, bring your passport
☐ Certified birth certificate	One district does not accept the hospital copy. You can obtain the certificate from any county health department
☐ Immunization certificate on the state's own form	Shots given abroad or in another state are transferred onto that form; one county health department will do the transfer and email the certificate
☐ Records and transcripts from the previous school	Bring them if you have them; not having them is not a ground for refusing enrollment
☐ Written interpreter request	Turkish is on no district's list. Make the request in writing and note the date
☐ If you are asked for a number	The education department's own document: federal privacy law prohibits requiring a number for enrollment . Carry a printout with you

- 1 Start collecting documents in your own name in your first week.** The real obstacle is proof of address, not the number.
- 2 Confirm which district your address falls into**, especially if the mailing address carries a large city's name.
- 3 Get the district's own document list from its page**; do not carry one district's list to another.
- 4 If you are staying with relatives, book the notarized affidavit appointment up front.**
- 5 Have the immunization record transferred onto the state form**; that is an appointment of its own.
- 6 Make your interpreter request in writing** and keep a copy.
- 7 Do not treat a scholarship application like enrollment**; if you are considering one, talk to your attorney first.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN TENNESSEE

Have a question about your immigration status?

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