

ACADEMIC ADVANTAGE ASSOCIATION HANDBOOK



Academic Advantage Association

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About Academic Advantage Association (AAA)

Who Are We?

Academic Advantage Association is an Option III homeschool association. Since our founding in 2005, we have worked to assist South Carolina parents who want to educate their children at home, providing them with the accountability required in the South Carolina Home School Statute. We strive to do so with the least amount of intrusion into their home and with as little expense, as possible. We believe that parents have the best idea of what teaching approach and curriculum will work well for their children, since they *know* their children. Our main objective is to support the parents.

Each of our employees homeschooled his or her children and has over twenty years of homeschool experience. We understand the challenges and rewards of homeschooling and can offer advice based on first-hand knowledge. We are also familiar with dozens of brands of homeschool curriculum. Our office is located at Lifelong Learning Resources, a retailer selling hundreds of homeschool products. The store is located at 557 Hammett Store Rd., Lyman, SC. Business hours are Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00p.m. Association members who have questions or need something specific can call or visit during any of those hours and speak to a real person, either via the phone or face-to-face. We also accept and answer questions via email and have a website that provides details about South Carolina's homeschool legislation and about the services we provide.

What Legal Requirements Guide Our Activities?

SC 59-65 is the legislation that permits and guides home education in South Carolina. The law makes homeschooling compulsory for children from ages 5 through 17. *Section 10 of the legislation does permit parents with a child “not six years of age on or before the first day of September of a particular school year” to elect for their child not to attend kindergarten. Parents who choose to waive kindergarten for a 5-year-old student must sign a written document with the school district notifying the district of their decision.*

The law also allows parents to choose among three options when they register to homeschool their students. Each option is explained in a separate section of the legislation.

SC-59-65-40, Option I: Parents may register their children with the school district in which they reside.

SC-59-65-45, Option II: Parents may register their children under the auspices of the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools (SCAIHS).

SC-59-65-47, Option III: Parents may register their children with associations set up for the specific purpose of assisting parents who educate their children at home.

Academic Advantage Association operates under Option III. Section 47 stipulates three requirements for a bona fide association for home schools. Associations must have at least 50 members. They must, by January 30th of each year, report the number and grade level of children home schooled through the association. Finally, they must see that their members meet the following requirements:

1. The teaching parent must hold at least a high school diploma or a GED.
2. The school year must have at least 180 days.
3. All students must receive instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Students in grades 7-12 substitute *literature* for *reading*, and must also add *composition*.
4. The teacher must keep accurate records of the subjects taught and the curriculum used, and must also verify the student's progress in each subject. To do this, parents must use some sort of log or plan book, prepare a semi-annual progress report for each student, and keep a portfolio of each student's academic work.

What services do we provide?

We offer **six membership levels** from which parents can choose:

Members receive a membership letter and a membership card that can be presented to organizations that offer educators' discounts. At the end of each school year, parents receive a Statement of Completion form to sign and return to our office. This form asks parents to affirm that they have met the four requirements that the state of South Carolina requires (see page 5) and is our means of assuring that AAA members are complying with the law.

Basic Package—This package will insure that parents are in compliance with the state law. It is for families who have children in grades K-8. The cost is \$25.00 per family from May through August. Families registering from September 1st through April pay \$50.00. The application form requires parents to provide Academic Advantage Association with contact information and with a list of the curriculum they plan to use with each homeschool student.

Basic Plus Package—This package includes the services of the Basic Package plus a report card (grade card) for each student. At the end of each school year, parents provide AAA with the grades and attendance records for each child. We take that information and place it onto our

association letterhead to create an official report card for parents to keep. (A copy of the form is found in the Documents section of this handbook.) Parents are responsible to provide report-ready information. The Basic Plus Package costs \$40.00 per family from May through August. Families registering from September 1st through April pay \$65.00.

High School Package—This package is required for any family with a high school student. See Basic Package for basic details. High school students will receive a transcript at the end of each high school year. Parents will need to turn in their grades by June 15th or May 30th for all seniors. This package is \$50.00 during the summer (May through August) or \$75 during the school year (September through April).

High School Plus Package—This package is for families who have a high school student(s) and also want report cards for younger children. At the end of each school year, parents provide AAA with the grades and attendance records for each child. We take that information and place it onto our association letterhead to create an official report card for parents to keep. (A copy of the form is found in the Documents section of this handbook.) Parents are responsible to provide report-ready information. This package is \$65 during the summer (May through August) and \$90 during the school year (September through April).

Graduation Package—This package is for parents who have high students who want to participate in the graduation ceremony. Parents choosing this package for a graduating senior will receive a group cap-and-gown graduation ceremony and a diploma. The Graduation Package costs \$75.00 per family from May through August. Families registering from September 1st through April pay \$100.

Graduation Plus Package—This package is for families who have a graduating senior choosing to attend our ceremony and also have younger children. At the end of each school year, parents provide AAA with the grades and attendance records for each child. We take that information and place it onto our association letterhead to create an official report card for parents to keep. (A copy of the form is found in the Documents section of this handbook.) Parents are responsible to provide report-ready information. This package is \$90.00 during the summer (May through August) and \$115.00 during the school year (September through April).

We provide the following individual services at an extra cost:

Diploma - Student does not wish to participate in the graduation ceremony.	\$20.00
Report Cards – Parent did not purchase a plus package.	\$20.00

Answers to Questions That People Frequently Ask

General Homeschooling Questions:

How do I know what curriculum to use?

The SC legislation dictates only the broad subject areas parents must teach (reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies) and allows parents to choose curriculum. Parents who want to use curriculum with a religious basis, may do so. Those who prefer a less traditional approach like *unschooling* or a Charlotte Mason style may use those. Of course, parents who want to mirror the public school system may also do that.

Parents who are unsure about what curriculum to use can seek counsel from homeschooling family and friends, refer to online sources and books that rate curriculum, or talk to retailers who sell homeschool curriculum. The choice of what to use lies with the parent. Come into Lifelong Learning Resources if you want to see and evaluate the curriculum in person.

Am I allowed to change curriculum during the school year if I dislike what I chose, or I find something that fits my students better?

Yes, you are. As long as you teach all of the required academic areas, you may use the curriculum you think will be best.

Am I required to have my children tested with a standardized test like Stanford, Iowa or BSAP?

No. Parents may opt to have their children tested, but South Carolina does not require standardized testing. Some accountability associations require their members to have their children tested. The homeschool legislation does not require testing, so we don't require it either. Parents can contact testing services like the one operated by Bob Jones University to schedule a testing date.

Must my homeschool calendar follow the public school calendar?

No. As long as you include 180 instructional days, you may schedule them in any fashion that suits your family. Some families teach all year and schedule breaks every 4-6 weeks. Some families take a long winter break, but teach part of the summer. Some families teach four days a week, with short breaks occasionally. Others include Saturday as a school day and have longer vacation times. As long as you include 180 instructional days and *document them in your planner*, you may arrange your calendar in any way you choose.

May I include field trip days as instructional days?

Certainly! Be sure to note in your planner where you went and what you did.

What must I include in my child's portfolio?

The homeschool law does not list what needs to be included. However, writing projects, tests, quizzes, worksheets, and samples of artwork are all good options. We recommend that you keep a reading list of all the books that your child reads each year. A carefully-kept portfolio will not only fulfill the legal requirement, but will also become a wonderful keepsake for you or your child.

What format must I use for my student's semi-annual progress report?

The homeschool law leaves this decision to the discretion of the parent. If you do not prepare quarterly or semi-annual report cards, you should prepare one progress report for the first half of the year and a second report for the second half of the year. If you give letter grades only, you should include a grading scale. If you do not wish to assign grades, you can simply use terms like Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, or Needs Improvement.

My child wants to participate in an interscholastic activity for the school district in which we live. Is he or she allowed to do so?

Yes, homeschooled students are now able to participate in interscholastic activities in the school district in which they live. Parents must contact the school and meet its requirements for the child to participate.

My school district contacted me about scheduling a home visit so that the district can verify the quality of my homeschool. Must I schedule one?

No. On February 27, 1989, the Attorney General of South Carolina issued an opinion declaring that school districts have no authority to require home visits.

Questions about homeschooling through high school:

Can students in 7th and 8th grade earn high-school credit?

Yes, they can earn high-school credit for core courses or foreign language, as long as they use a high-school curriculum. For instance, an 8th grader taking a year of Algebra I using a standard 9th grade text would earn 1 math credit for his high-school transcript.

What credits does the state of South Carolina require before a student graduates?

Below are the graduation requirements for students receiving a diploma from the SC Department of Education. Home educators are not required to meet these exact requirements. However, we recommend that parents who want their children to attend college follow these guidelines fairly closely. Parents do not need to teach the courses in the same order as the state schools teach them, nor must they limit their elective credits to courses available to students in public school.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Units Required</u>
English/Language Arts	4.0
Mathematics	4.0
Science	3.0
U.S. History and Constitution	1.0
Economics	0.5
U.S. Government	0.5
Other Social Studies	1.0
Physical Education or Junior ROTC	1.0
Computer Science (including keyboarding)	1.0
Foreign Language or Career and Technology Education	1.0
Electives	7.0
Total	24.0

What are some possible elective courses?

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it gives an idea of how broad the elective category is.

Bible:

Bible Doctrines
Church History
Individual Book/Topical Studies
New Testament Survey
Old Testament Survey

Business and Finance:

Accounting
Advertising
Business Law
Business Math
Entrepreneurship
Financial Management
Intro to Business Management
Intro to Marketing
Office Applications
Personal Finance

Fine Arts (Art, Music, Speech):

Architecture
Art Appreciation
Art History
Band
Ceramics
Debate
Drama/Theatre
Drawing
Film Making
Instrumental Music
Jewelry Making
Music Appreciation
Music History
Oratory
Orchestra
Painting
Photography
Public Speaking

Health/PE:

Archery
Aerobics
CPR Course
Cycling
Golfing
Gymnastics
High-School Health
Jogging/Running
Nutrition
Swimming
Table Tennis
Team Sports
Weight Training

Fine Arts (continued)

Speech
Storytelling
Voice

Computer:

Computer Systems
Desktop Publishing
Digital Media
Graphic Design
Information Technology
Networking
Programming Languages
Software Development
Web Design

Writing:

Business Writing
Creative Writing
Journalism
Editing/Proofreading
Writing from Research

General Skills:

Auto Maintenance/Repair
Basic Home Repair
Budgeting
Cake Decorating
Cooking
Driver's Ed
Gardening
Home Economics
Interior Design
Sewing
Sign Language
Study Skills

Social Sciences:

Anthropology
Archeology
Psychology
Sociology

Is there more than one way to earn a high-school credit?

Yes. High school credits—called Carnegie credits—can be earned either by completing a recognized high-school text or by completing a specified number of hours of study for the course. Students who complete 80% of a high-school text and receive a passing grade are considered to have earned the credit for the course. Generally, 120-150 hours of study constitute 1 credit. To have their students earn credit this way, parents need to record the hours in their log book or planner. Earning credits by logging hours is particularly attractive for credits in PE, home economics, or the fine arts.

What is the Uniform Grading Policy and how does it affect my student's GPA?

The **Uniform Grading Policy** (UGP) is South Carolina's three-layered grading approach, which allows more rigorous course work to generate more quality points (and therefore a feasibly higher GPA.) The UGP includes four types of courses, and also permits students to earn dual credit (high school and college) in certain situations.

- 1. College Prep Courses**—These courses use a standard high-school text and meet the typical requirements for that course. This is the *de facto* category—courses that do not meet Honors or AP requirements are College Prep courses.
- 2. Honors Courses**—These courses are more challenging. The work should be 40-50 percent more than a regular high school course. You should document what you have done to make it an honors course. You might do a portion of another textbook, read extra books, write more papers, or do a special project. Honors classes earn an extra $\frac{1}{2}$ quality point compared to college prep courses.
- 3. AP (Advanced Placement) Courses**—These courses are college-level courses taught from a college-level text. AP courses typically have at least one prerequisite course that must be completed before the AP can be attempted. The College Board website contains a page that details the AP requirements (<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/index.html>). Parents need to receive approval from the College Board to classify a course as AP. Approved AP classes earn 1 extra quality point compared to college prep courses.
- 4. Dual Credit Courses**—Beginning in 11th grade, students may take college courses at a local community or technical college. Students who complete the courses successfully receive both college credit and a full high-school credit. Students wishing to take Dual Credit courses will need a transcript from AAA verifying the courses and grades they have already taken before they enroll.

Calculating a GPA—A student's GPA is calculated by dividing the total number of quality points earned by the total number of credits earned. Thus, a student who earned 108 quality points on 27 credits would have a 4.0 GPA. A student scoring well in several AP and Honors

classes often finishes with a GPA of 4.50 or more.

To help parents determine a student’s GPA, the Uniform Grading Policy provides a conversion scale for each numerical score from 61-100 for each of the three types of courses. The chart is presented below.

South Carolina Uniform Grading Scale Conversions

Numerical	Grade	College Prep	Honors	AP/IB/Dual Credit
100	A	5.0	5.5	6.0
99	A	4.9	5.4	5.9
98	A	4.8	5.3	5.8
97	A	4.7	5.2	5.7
96	A	4.6	5.1	5.6
95	A	4.5	5.0	5.5
94	A	4.4	4.9	5.4
93	A	4.3	4.8	5.3
92	A	4.2	4.7	5.2
91	A	4.1	4.6	5.1
90	B	4.0	4.5	5.0
89	B	3.9	4.4	4.9
88	B	3.8	4.3	4.8
87	B	3.7	4.2	4.7
86	B	3.6	4.1	4.6
85	B	3.5	4.0	4.5
84	B	3.4	3.9	4.4
83	B	3.3	3.8	4.3
82	B	3.2	3.7	4.2
81	B	3.1	3.6	4.1
80	C	3.0	3.5	4.0
79	C	2.9	3.4	3.9
78	C	2.8	3.3	3.8
77	C	2.7	3.2	3.7
76	C	2.6	3.1	3.6
75	C	2.5	3.0	3.5
74	C	2.4	2.9	3.4
73	C	2.3	2.8	3.3
72	C	2.2	1.7	3.2
71	C	2.1	1.6	3.1
70	D	2.0	1.5	3.0
69	D	1.9	1.4	2.9
68	D	1.8	1.3	2.8
67	D	1.7	1.2	2.7
66	D	1.6	1.1	2.6
65	D	1.5	1.0	2.5
64	D	1.4	1.9	2.4
63	D	1.3	1.8	2.3
62	D	1.2	1.7	2.2
61	D	1.1	1.6	2.1
60	F	1.0	1.5	2.0
59	F	.9	1.4	1.9
58	F	.8	1.3	1.8
57	F	.7	1.2	1.7
56	F	.6	1.1	1.6
55	F	.5	1.0	1.5
54	F	.4	.9	1.4
53	F	.3	.8	1.3
52	F	.2	.7	1.2
51	F	.1	.6	1.1
0-50	F	0	0	0

What are the details of the graduation ceremony?

Our graduation ceremony is usually held the 2nd and/or 3rd Friday in May. We have the ceremony at a church in the area. Seniors usually wear a cap and gown, but this is not required. The graduates can wear whatever color of gown they choose. Parents are responsible to rent their graduate's gown. Jostens has gowns and class rings. They have stores in Greenville and Spartanburg. You can also order online – which I would recommend.

Ours is a family-centered graduation. We show a slide presentation of each graduate, with 10 pictures showing the graduate from childhood to graduation day. Graduates participate in the music, readings, and presentations. Parents present their graduate with a diploma and tell the audience a little about their family's homeschooling journey. We celebrate after the ceremony with a reception for all who attend.

Are graduating seniors required to attend the graduation ceremony?

No. Attendance is encouraged, but not required. We realize that some families are involved in co-ops, churches or other groups that also host ceremonies for their graduates.

Questions about preparing a student to enter college:

How early should my student contact the college he wants to attend?

Students do not actually need to contact a college until they take the SAT or ACT, since those scores will greatly affect the amount of interest a college has in recruiting that student. However, if students are interested in a particularly selective major, they may want to contact the college—or access its website—as early as their freshman or sophomore year to see what courses the college expects its incoming freshmen to have on their transcripts. Contacting the college early, or accessing its website, allows students to make sure their transcripts contain what their chosen university wants to see.

Should my student take the SAT, the ACT, or both?

Base that decision on the preference of the college(s) your student is interested in attending. Some universities accept either the SAT or the ACT. Others require one or the other. Some students score significantly better on one test than they do on the other. Students needing a particular percentile score may benefit from taking both tests once, comparing the results, and then determining which test to take again, if necessary.

When should my student take the SAT or ACT?

It's wise to have your students take the SAT or ACT in their junior year. This gives students who scored lower than they anticipated time to bolster a weak area or to polish their overall test-taking skills. Students who scored well may want to take the test again in order to move from a *good* score to an *excellent* score, and thereby open doors for additional scholarships. There is no limit to the number of times students may sit for these exams. Students can register online at sat.collegeboard.org for the SAT, or at actstudent.org for the ACT.

Does AAA rank for South Carolina scholarships?

Yes, we do. Grades for the freshman, sophomore and junior years must be turned in to us by June 15th. Seniors must turn in their grades by May 30th. Of course, we love to see grades turned in earlier.

What ranking information will I need to provide?

AAA ranks according to the Uniform Grading Policy. Parents must submit percentage grades for each of the classes their child took; letter grades will not suffice. Parents will also need to indicate whether the courses were for 1 credit or ½ credit. Each course must be designated as either College Prep, Honors, AP or Dual Credit.

When does AAA need the grade information?

Sophomores are required to turn in their freshman grades when they enroll for their sophomore year. Juniors must submit their sophomore grades when they enroll for their junior year. All seniors are required to turn in their junior grades when they enroll for their senior year. We must receive the grades by June 15th. Senior grades must be submitted by May 30 of their graduation year.

What requirements must a student meet in order to receive scholarships from the state of South Carolina?

South Carolina offers three scholarships to students who attend college in the state. To qualify for any of the scholarships, students must meet general eligibility requirements. Students must meet U.S. citizenship or residency requirements, be a legal resident of South Carolina, graduate from a South Carolina high school (or meet certain stipulations), be a full-time student pursuing a first baccalaureate degree, not have a felony record, and not be in default or delinquent in paying any state or federal financial aid. These general requirements apply to all three scholarships, with just a few modifications. Parents need to know and comply with the specific standards for the scholarship for which their student applies.

To determine if a student is academically eligible for state scholarships, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education requires all homeschools to submit transcripts that contain grades calculated according to the Uniform Grading Scale. The student's official transcript must show his or her cumulative GPA (unrounded and calculated to at least two decimal places) and class rank. The Commission on Higher Education requires the class rank to be calculated by the homeschool association. The transcript must come from the accountability association rather than the student's parents.

Requirements for each scholarship are as follows:

LIFE Scholarship Program

In 1998 the South Carolina General Assembly approved the Legislative for Future Excellence (LIFE) Scholarship Program. Students earning this merit-based scholarship must meet two of the three following requirements: 1) Cumulative 3.0 GPA, 2) score of 1100 on SAT or 24 on the ACT, 3) rank in the top 30% of class. Students must earn a cumulative college GPA of 3.0 in order to retain the scholarship for up to eight semesters. We must receive all scores for grades 9-11 no later than June 15th for class ranking. Grade 12 scores must be in by May 30th.

Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program

The Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program is also a merit-based scholarship program administered by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. It is the largest of the

three scholarships, and, therefore, has more rigorous requirements. Each Palmetto Fellow may receive a scholarship of up to \$6,700 annually. Fifty percent of the funds are distributed in fall semester. The other half is distributed during spring semester. Palmetto Fellows must meet eligibility rules and maintain a GPA of 4.0 to receive funds for up to eight semesters of study toward a first baccalaureate degree. Students may qualify for the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship by scoring at least 1400 on the SAT or at least 32 on the ACT. Students not meeting that requirement may also qualify if they meet these requirements: Have a GPA in the top 6% of their class for either the sophomore, junior, or senior years, and score at least 1200 on the SAT or 27 on the ACT. We must receive all scores for grades 9-11 no later than June 15th for class ranking. Grade 12 scores must be in by May 30th.

HOPE Scholarship Program

The South Carolina HOPE Scholarship Program was approved by the General Assembly during the 2001 legislative session. The HOPE scholarship is also merit-based, and was designed for students who earn a 3.0 GPA, but do not score high enough on the SAT or ACT to qualify for the LIFE scholarship. Students can receive the HOPE Scholarship for their freshman year only, but may apply for the LIFE Scholarship the following year as long as they have a GPA of 3.0 or higher. We must receive all scores for grades 9-11 no later than June 15th for class ranking. Grade 12 scores must be in by May 30th.