

ECS

Essential Church School

Handbook

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Basic Information

Essential Contact Information

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<http://www.twitter.com/essentialcs>

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<http://www.facebook.com/EssentialChurchSchool>

Getting Started

Introduction

Essential Church School, an educational outreach of Essential Church, is a church school which offers off-site instruction for homeschooling families. Our purpose is to offer the support that your family needs in order to freely educate your children.

Parent Responsibilities

Parents are responsible to diligently and consistently teach their children. The parent is responsible for the actual education of the child; the school is a support for the parents. Parents must provide supervision during normal public school hours.

The parent's responsibility to Essential is to keep a record of attendance and pay fees as detailed in the Financial Responsibilities. The attendance record will be mailed to the school at the end of the school year and due no later than June 30th. Grades should be sent if parents would like for Essential to maintain a transcript. Essential will provide forms for reporting grades and attendance.

Complying with the Law

Alabama does not have a separate homeschool law. We function under the church school provisions in the Alabama Code. For church school enrollment, it is the parent's responsibility to file a church school enrollment form with the local school superintendent. Essential highly suggests that parents send this form by certified mail and keep copies and receipts with other important papers.

Home School Legal Defense Association

Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is an association of attorneys who teach their own children at home and who defend the homeschooling rights of members nationwide. One of the most comforting areas of support any homeschool family can have is the assurance of knowing you have help with any legal matters that may arise.

Essential highly recommends, but does not require, membership with HSLDA. A local support group, Highlands Homeschoolers, has a group status with HSLDA which provides a membership fee discount. Their name (Highlands Homeschoolers) and group number – 299161 – MUST appear on your HSLDA application. You can apply online at <http://www.hslda.org>.

Curriculum

Each family is responsible to choose and purchase the curriculum for their own students. Parents should incorporate the study of reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, English, geography, science, health, physical education, and US and Alabama history.

You have flexibility in the resources you choose and the amount of content you cover each year. For instance, if you decide to do one quarter of history and three quarters of science or all your science first semester and all your history second semester, that is your decision. In the early elementary years you may decide how much to cover in the non-core subjects, but you should at least touch on each one every year.

If you need assistance with selecting curriculum, please contact us for references in homeschool counseling.

Days Required

The State requires Private Tutors to complete 140 days of instruction, and public schools are normally in attendance for 180 days. Essential recommends that you complete approximately 160 days each school year, but does not set a certain requirement.

School Year and Dates

Our Essential school year begins July 1 and ends June 30. A full year of school should be accomplished between these dates. You may choose to use a traditional September-to-June year or your own personalized schedule.

Student Files

Upon your signed approval, Essential will request the permanent, or cumulative, file from the former school. We also provide printable and online forms which you can use to send grades and attendance as you desire for transcript purposes. These files are kept private and will not be shared with others without your permission or a legal subpoena.

Operating Your Class

Keeping Student Records

Essential and the Alabama law requires that you keep a record of attendance. Though your student should never be absent, you do need to keep a record of school days. We provide printable and online forms for you to use or you can create your own. This record needs to be submitted by June 30th of each school year.

We also provide academic reporting forms to use if desired. It is important to keep a record of the education your students are receiving. So, even if you don't send in reports to the Essential office, please keep those records in your home.

Attendance Records

Essential is held responsible by law to keep a record of attendance for each student. You are required to give a year-end attendance report by June 30th of each school year. We provide printable and online form for you to use.

Mark each day you hold class. We do not have a minimum number of minutes or hours per day required to determine a "school day." Field trips can be counted as school days. If you take a week or more of school vacation, do not count that week(s) for school attendance or absence.

Grading

Essential does not require grades or report cards, but you are able to send in these reports to allow Essential to develop and keep transcripts. Report card forms and transcripts are available on the school website.

Testing

Essential believes that testing is good for practice and preparation, especially for those who plan to attend college. It is also important in your day-to-day schooling to evaluate if a concept has been mastered. Testing can be verbal, written, or even simple discussion.

Standardized testing is encouraged for grades 5 and up. The various options of testing through Essential will be published, explained and coordinated as available. Additional costs will vary, but are typically \$25 to \$60 per student.

High School

Students in grades 9-12 require special records in preparation for graduation and college entrance. In addition, older students require special paperwork from the school when they are applying for work or applying for driver's license/permit. Parents should contact the office to request these forms when needed.

In addition, parents and students are responsible to keep record of their high school accomplishments for diploma requirements. Essential Church School offers two (2) different diploma options:

General Diploma – Student completes 24 credits that include 4 English credits, 4 Math credits (must include Algebra 1 & Geometry), 4 Social Studies credits, 4 Science credits, 1 Physical Education credit, ½ Health credit, ½ Arts credit, and ½ Computer credit. These are the same guidelines as the Alabama public schools require for a general high school diploma.

Advanced Diploma – Student completes at least 24 credits that include same requirements as General except with Math credit in Algebra II (along with Algebra 1 and Geometry) and addition of 2 Foreign Language credits.

To graduate and receive a diploma, Essential will require a transcript showing the fulfillment of the diploma requirements. It is encouraged that parents/students send in transcript updates throughout the high school years in order to aid in college entrance and in keeping record of your student's accomplishments. Again, it is the responsibility of the parent/student to maintain these records. Essential has made forms available to aid in the process.

The school website will list other resources and information to help prepare and assist in record-keeping during the high school years.

Membership Benefits & Responsibilities

Small Groups and Meetings

Essential does not require attendance for meetings or support groups, but we know that successful homeschoolers are not doing it alone. We encourage you to get connected with a support system, whether it is a co-op program, field trips or support groups.

We have partnered with Highlands Homeschoolers to offer field trips, holiday parties, park days, and fellowship with other homeschool families.

From time to time, we may offer special meetings about specific educational issues.

Communication

Our monthly e-newsletter is our primary means of communicating with our members. Please read it. Much information is included in this publication that you will receive no other way. Included are meeting announcements, legal updates, information regarding school activities and requirements, teaching tips and curriculum suggestions; also incorporated are other resources, such as field trip suggestions, special events of interest, etc.

We will allow space for members to communicate details about any class they may arrange to teach. We will include short “school family ads.” If you wish to submit an item for the newsletter (always subject to editing), do so via email and send it to the office by the 1st of each month for inclusion in that month’s newsletter. Newsletters will be emailed on or before the 15th of each month.

We have established a Twitter account to send out quick communication or share useful tips/resources. You can find us at <http://www.twitter.com/essentialcs>.

An Essential Facebook group is also available online for additional communication and support. You can find us at <http://www.facebook.com/EssentialChurchSchool>.

Financial Responsibilities

Registration

Open registration for new members is from April 1 to August 31 each year. Beginning September 1, contact via email to determine any special arrangements for late registration. Current members are required to confirm re-enrollment by August 1st by submitting the full tuition payment.

Tuition

The total fee per family will be \$125 for the school year, and there is no registration fee. New members must include the tuition with their application, and current members should pay the full tuition by August 1st of each school year. All tuition is nonrefundable upon acceptance of application, and there will be no proration of fees for late registrants or early withdrawals.

Limited financial assistance may be available, and parents experiencing financial difficulties should contact us immediately.

Failure to pay tuition will constitute withdrawal from the school, and the local superintendent will be notified 30 days after a written notice to the parent.

Late Fees

Unless prior arrangements have been made, late fees will be assessed for tuition received after the date on which it is due. Tuition late fee is \$5 per month.

Testing Fees

Standardized achievement testing is available for all students K-12. The cost depends upon the test used, but is usually about \$25 to \$60; testing is done in the spring and payment in full is due when ordering. This is to be arranged by the parent, and the school may offer assistance in connecting with test administrators.

Other Expenses

HSLDA membership is highly suggested, though not required. You can use Highlands Homeschoolers' group number – 299161 – for discount membership. HSLDA provides many different payment options. Go to their website to join online: <http://www.hslda.org>.

Parents are responsible for the purchase of curriculum of his/her choice, field trip expenses and other activities.

Fundraising

Essential Church School participates in several fundraising programs, and we offer opportunities for families to participate and receive tuition compensation or curriculum purchase options.

Box Tops for Education

Box Tops are available on common grocery items, and families are encouraged to cut and submit these Box Tops in the fall and in the spring. For more information and ways to help our school, visit <http://boxtops4education.com>.

Publix Partners Card

Publix has given our school Partners cards which when scanned at each shopping visit will accumulate a percentage that will be sent to the school.

Extras

School Office

We are here to help you. Feel free to email with your questions, to make appointments for consultation, or to use our library items.

For phone calls, office hours are 1pm to 3pm on Mondays & Wednesdays. The office will be closed on major national holidays as well as during the traditional two-week Christmas break. It may be closed on a few other special occasions, for example during a scheduled field trip.

Library

We have a small library which contains books and videos for students and parents. Donations to our library are welcomed. A number of items of curriculum have been donated and are available for rental. If you wish to borrow a book or other curriculum item, it is available for your use for the entire school year (one year at a time). A deposit may be charged, part of which will be returned when you return the item in usable condition. School members can request and view items online at <http://essentialchurchschool.org/library>.

School Identity Items

School items such as t-shirts, school pictures, student ID cards and a yearbook add to the spirit and enthusiasm for our school. Watch the newsletter for availability of each of these.

Yearbook

We will use the Shutterfly online photo service to catalog our activities and the activities of our students. Feel free to visit our Shutterfly website to add pictures of your students as they go on field trips or complete special projects. Either parents or students can help to create a photo book which we can use for a yearbook. Our Shutterfly site is <http://essentialchurchschool.shutterfly.com>.

Activities

Purpose

The purpose of school activities is to provide enrichment to the academic focus of our families and offer opportunities for interaction. We offer a wide variety of activities, and we have partnered with Highlands Homeschoolers to offer even more! Attendance is not required; in fact, if you attend them all, you are likely not spending enough time schooling.

All of our activities are provided by volunteer staff. The greater participation we receive, the more varied our activities can be. A variety of activities families or small groups can do on their own will be available as "field trip resources." If you know of something others might enjoy, let us know so we can include it as appropriate.

Unless otherwise indicated, field trips and events organized by the school are open to all homeschool families.

Cost

Many of our activities are free while others will have a fee equivalent to what we are charged. Activity fees are nonrefundable.

Behavior and Supervision

Homeschooling is often under the scrutiny of others, and our behavior should be above reproach.

Parent supervision is required at all school activities unless specific arrangements are made and a permission slip/medical release is provided to the “substitute teacher.”

Planned Field Trips

Highlands Homeschoolers offers many different field trips options, and you are encouraged to join their support group at <http://www.highlandshomeschoolers.com>. These field trips are large and geared to meet the general needs of homeschool families. Rarely are tickets issued to an event since entry is based on group rates, as well as entry as a group.

If you wish to plan a field trip and you want to invite others to participate, let us know and we will be happy to publicize your trip.

Presidential Physical Fitness Challenge

We would like to offer participation in the Presidential Physical Fitness Challenge (PPFC). Our students are instructed in the specific activities, given opportunity to practice together and are then tested. At the end of the year awards are presented. This will be offered as parents volunteer to coordinate.

Pizza Hut BOOK IT! Reading Incentive

Pizza Hut’s BOOK IT! program is offered to encourage reading in grades K-6. On May 1st, enrollment is available at <http://www.bookitprogram.com/Enrollment/homeschool.asp> for the next school year.

Book Adventure

Book Adventure is a FREE reading motivation program for children in grades K-8. Children create their own book lists from over 7,000 recommended titles, take multiple choice quizzes on the books they've read, and earn points and prizes for their literary successes. Book Adventure was created by and is maintained by Sylvan Learning. Please contact us for how you can enroll through Essential.

World Math Day

Each year in March we participate in World Math Day, an online math competition for all ages. If you would like to have your student participate, please contact us for how you can enroll through Essential.

Sports/Music/Arts Programs

As long as we have volunteer staff, sports/music/arts programs will be offered. These may include general P.E. in a variety of sports and/or organized, competitive sports. Music/arts programs may include choir, orchestra, or drama teams. If you are interested in volunteering to sponsor these programs, please contact us.

Field Trip Resource Center

One of the great advantages homeschooling has over other modes of schooling is the ability to more greatly utilize field trips as an educational tool. Unit studies can be built around field trips or an interest in reading can be developed through their use. While the school may arrange field trips throughout the year, these cannot possibly fulfill all of your specific needs.

We will keep a file of places of interest in the Birmingham area for homeschooling families. If you collect any information you would like to share with others please send it in! Add your personal comments about the location.

Finishing Up

End of Year Events

At the end of each school year an opportunity is offered in which parents can recognize the special accomplishments of their students. Awards are presented for completion of school programs, for improvement in personal character or even for other non-school accomplishments. Kindergarten “graduates” are honored.

A memorable time for students comes at the end of the year when we honor the graduates from high school as well as sixth grade and eighth grade grads. Again, parent participation is required to make these events meaningful and memorable.

Withdrawing Before Year End

If you enroll your student in another school, please notify us immediately. Attendance records will also be due immediately upon withdrawal. PLEASE NOTE: If record keeping is delinquent and you withdraw or are dropped by the school, the official enrollment dates listed in the cumulative files will reflect only the period of time for which we have received records.

If you leave the school owing money, there will be a delay in forwarding the cumulative file and a notice of funds owed may be put in your student’s file.

If you are withdrawing and enrolling in another school, that school will request your student’s cumulative file from us. We will send it directly to them. You do not need to transport it. You may sign a release form and pick up your student’s cumulative files to be kept at home. Remember that you should have these files at home already, and we are only keeping copies for transcript purposes.

There are no refunds for early withdrawal.

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