

ECS

Essential Church School

Handbook

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Basic Information

Essential Contact Information

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Birmingham, AL 35242

Contact Us

Email: info@essentialchurchschool.org

Phone and SMS: (205) 201-0327

Find Us Online

Website: <http://www.essentialchurchschool.org>

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

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

Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/essentialcs>

Curriculum Library: <http://essentialchurchschool.org/library>

Shutterfly Photo Site: <http://essentialchurchschool.shutterfly.com>

Statement of Faith

Essential Church School believes in the essential tenets of the Christian faith shared by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV): "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

Getting Started

Introduction

Essential Church School is a church school which offers off-site instruction for homeschooling families. Our purpose is to help people fulfill their God-calling to homeschool by providing a structure with Kingdom perspective to equip families with knowledge and support.

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 is due no later than June 30th. Grades should be sent to the school if parents would like for Essential to maintain a complete transcript. Essential will provide online 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 group status with HSLDA has been set up which provides a membership fee discount. The group number – 299161 – MUST appear on your HSLDA application for the discount. You can apply online at <http://www.hslda.org>.

Curriculum

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

Days Required

The Alabama Code does not require a certain number of school days for church schools. The State does require 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 require that you keep a record of attendance for each student. Though your student should never be absent, you do need to keep a record of school days. We prefer that you use the provided printable and online forms. A complete attendance record needs to be submitted by June 30th of each school year. If you submit records monthly or quarterly, you should ensure that all your monthly and quarterly reports have been filed by June 30th of the school year.

We also provide academic reporting forms. It is important to keep a record of the education your students are receiving. We encourage you to submit these forms to the school office for your student's official school records.

A completed high school transcript is required for graduation from Essential Church School.

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 or upon withdrawal from the school. We provide printable and online forms for you to use.

Mark each day you hold class. We do not have a minimum number of hours per day required to determine a "school day." Educational 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 for elementary or middle school students, but you are able to send in these reports to allow Essential to develop and keep transcripts and official student records. Report card forms and transcripts are available on the school website.

Though some parents may want to keep their privacy, submitting grades can be helpful and even needed if a family plans to move or change schools. Parents should have academic records easily accessible, and high school families are required to submit grades and transcripts for recognition of graduation.

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 online. Additional costs will vary, but tests 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, and 1 Life Skills credit. (These are similar to the guidelines for Alabama public school diplomas, but not completely. Alabama public schools require Algebra II and 3 additional credits in career/technology, arts, or foreign language.)

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. Parents should send in transcript updates each year 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.

Independent Diploma and Transcript

We offer the option for entering high school students to determine how they will receive recognition of their high school work. Parents and students choosing an Independent Diploma will develop their own diploma requirements, maintain their own high school transcript, and provide their own independent diploma.

Parents will still report attendance to Essential and are responsible to submit the completed high school transcript for recognition of graduation by June 30th of the graduating school year. An Independent Diploma or Independent Transcript can only list Essential as the school of enrollment.

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 benefit from relationships. 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 [Birmingham Homeschoolers Community](#) 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. Included in the newsletter 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, incoming registrations should first contact the school office 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 and a short online form.

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 our school's group number – 299161 – for discount membership. HSLDA provides many different payment options. Go to their website to join online: <http://www.hsllda.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. Phone appointments can be arranged outside of office hours via email. 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, like a scheduled field trip.

Curriculum Library

We have a curriculum library which contains curriculum, books, and videos for students and parents. Donations to our library are welcomed. A number of items 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. Only local and current school members can request and view items online at <http://essentialchurchschool.org/library>.

We also encourage parents to write reviews of the materials in our library by using the online system. This gives other homeschool families feedback on how a particular book or curriculum was used or helpful. In this way, our library becomes a curriculum review as well as a curriculum resource.

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. ID cards can be requested directly from the office. Other identity items will be advertised as they are available throughout the school year.

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>.

Online Resources

We provide links to online resources on our website which will assist in the homeschool journey. In addition, we have established Pinterest boards to share online resources that may be useful. Please follow us at <http://pinterest.com/essentialcs>, and let us know if you would like to be involved in helping develop these boards more fully.

Activities

Purpose

The purpose of school activities is to provide enrichment to the academic focus of our families and offer opportunities for interaction. We have partnered with [Birmingham Homeschoolers Community](#) to offer a wide variety of activities. 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. Independent field trip resources are listed on our Pinterest boards.

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

Birmingham Homeschoolers Community offers many different field trips options, and you are encouraged to join their support group at <http://birminghamhomeschoolers.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. Membership with BHC allows you to post field trips on their website.

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.

You and your students can participate with our school in independent fitness challenges at <http://www.presidentschallenge.org> by enrolling and using the Essential Church School Group ID: 11509.

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 Education Days

Each year in March we participate in World Education Days---online math, spelling, and science competitions 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 helping us develop any of 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 on our Pinterest boards. If you collect any information you would like to share with others please send it in! Add your personal comments about the location to the Pinterest boards as well to help others know how you benefitted from a certain activity.

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 other non-academic accomplishments.

Graduation Celebration

The third Sunday afternoon of May is set aside to recognize our kindergarten graduates and offer families an opportunity to present awards to students at other grade levels. Parents should watch the monthly e-newsletters for details about how to confirm their participation.

High School Graduation Ceremony

We have set aside the Friday evening before Memorial Day as our official ceremony date for honoring our high school graduates. An intimate cap and gown ceremony with friends and family is arranged. Graduates are not required to participate. A graduation fee of \$50 will be required for participation which covers the graduate's cap, gown, and tassel, as well as complimentary admittance for up to 4 guests. Additional guests will require a per person fee.

Withdrawing Before Year End

If you enroll your student in another school, please notify us immediately. Attendance records are 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.

There are no refunds for early withdrawal.

Withdrawal Procedure

Withdrawal is complete upon the receipt of:

1. Communication of your intent to withdraw (an online form is available)
2. Submission of all required attendance records
3. Return of all loaned school library items
4. All fees paid in full

If you would like records to be sent to your new school, please indicate the school name and address in your communications. Records will not be sent until all required attendance records have been submitted.

It is the parent's responsibility to provide the required paperwork for a new school. Essential will provide an official school transcript with student records as requested.

Withdrawing at Year End

If you are not re-enrolling with us for the next school year, please indicate this on your re-enrollment form and provide the information needed to forward your student's files to the new school. This simple step will prevent unneeded emails and reminders about enrollment.

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