



SC TOP Handbook

The Third Option Participants (TOP)—accountability

SC TOP Homeschool Accountability provides accountability services under the 3rd Option code of law SC 59-65-47. SC TOP is open to all homeschoolers in South Carolina, regardless of religious preference, political affiliation, ethnic background, family structure or educational philosophy.

Third option accountability groups trust parents to maintain their records and pursue the child's educational best interests. SC TOP does not interfere with parents rights about their choices. We hold each other accountable to the minimum standard of the law.

But, 3rd option doesn't mean you have to figure it all on your own. We believe meaningful connections (online and in person) are essential components for homeschool success. We provide resources and opportunities to meet-up with the director and fellow homeschoolers.

How to Join SC TOP:

Application and Fees: Registration form and payment are available online. Immediate automated email confirmation will be sent at the time of registration. Membership packets will be processed and sent by mail as soon as possible.

- Fees: **Kindergarten to 8th grade** (no high school credits)
\$10/student before August 1st
\$15/student after August 1st
- 9th-10th grade** (and middle school students with high school credits)
\$20/student before August 1st
\$25/student after August 1st
- 11th-12th grade**
\$30/student before August 1st
\$35/student after August 1st

Fee waivers and discount request because of financial hardship, military discount, single parents or families with more than 4 students may be considered by submitting the inquiry to director@sc-top.org. No refunds after membership packet has been issued.

Withdrawing from another school or accountability group: It is the applicant's responsibility to notify the school when withdrawing their children from a school. Schools will want a copy of the member letter for their records. Members should keep the original member letter in their records.

Parents should be prepared to submit all books and materials back to the school when notifying the school of transferring to homeschool. You can request school records to be transferred over to you at that time. Some schools will prefer to send the records later. South Carolina law states that the parent is the school official and is the designated recipient of the school records.

We also ask members to notify previous accountability director that you will be transferring your membership to SC TOP. It is a courtesy we would ask when our members transfer from us, too.

SC TOP applications are open all year. However, the application is only available by request after April 15th. SC TOP will not permit late spring memberships of truancy or excessive absences, failing grades or other related issues. Applicants who are moving or have health issues may apply.

Membership Letter/Welcome Packet: Once the SC TOP application is processed, the welcome packet will be issued and mailed. The welcome packet contains: a welcome letter briefly explaining SC TOP policies, an official pressure sealed membership letter, and a laminated wallet card.

Wallet Card: signifies compliance with SC TOP, can be used to obtain retailer discounts for educators.

Membership Letter: The member letter is a very important document. It is the document that you will need to take to the DMV for drivers licenses and free admission to the state museum. It is your official proof for legal compliance and should be kept where you can access it anytime during the year.

**The membership letter should be sufficient documentation for the DMV. However, some locations have asked for another format of the letter (with a current date and verifying the student is not expelled or truant). SC TOP can email a DMV letter to any member upon request. Please give 24 hours notice.

Update/Withdraw notice: Current members who need to update your file, please use this form. Change of mailing address, change phone number listing, add a student.

Calendar Year: The membership year is from July 1 to June 30 each year to conform to public school attendance dates.

Homeschooling families are still able to set their own school calendars as long as they complete the compliance forms by the June 5th. The law requires 180 days. Many of our members homeschool more than 180 days, but it is only necessary to document 180.

Homeschoolers should be registered with an accountability association by the 10th day after the start of public school where they are zoned. If the homeschool is not registered by that time, they can be reported as truant. So, SC TOP recommends that participants register by the 1st of August.

Members who join by August 1st also receive a discount rate for early registration. That discount is the reward for legal compliance!

Compliance Forms and Records:

In order to maintain our status as an approved homeschool association, SC TOP files an annual standards assurance form in compliance with the SC Department of Education. SC TOP members comply with this by completing 180 day forms verifying they have maintained the following records as specified in the “3rd Option” law. The parent must have a GED or higher education.

Your curriculum must include, but not limited to, the areas of reading, writing, math, science and social studies, and for grades seven and above, composition and literature. *You may use curriculum packages from specific publishers, an eclectic approach – pick and choose among many different publishers for your curriculum, or a student-directed learning approach with library and Internet materials.*

- You must keep records. The records must include:
 - a plan book, diary, or other record indicating subjects taught and activities in which the student and parent-teacher engage;
 - and a portfolio of samples of student’s academic work;
 - and a semiannual progress report including attendance records and individualized documentation of the student’s progress in each of the required academic areas.

You may also use your own format of record keeping: teacher planning books, notebooks for diary narratives (a different book for each child), or record keeping software. The portfolio is a sampling of work, not every paper.

Keep these in your files; do not send to SC TOP. Members may request FREE evaluation of their records. SC TOP can offer suggestions for improvement and encouragement. These records should be meaningful to the individual member. They serve to inspire and encourage yourself on days when the going gets tough. The records should demonstrate progress over time.

90-day Report Form: SC TOP members will submit 90-day report form by January 5th. This mid-year checkpoint form is found on the website (linked on the home page). SC TOP prepares a report for the number of students we have enrolled in each school zone by the end of January. This compliance form verifies that members are still homeschooling, they have not enrolled in another school or moved out of state. It also reminds everyone the legal requirements, so that anyone needing assistance can gather the necessary records for compliance before the end of the year.

180-day Report Form: SC TOP members will submit 180-day report form by June 5th. This end of year form is found on the website (linked on the home page). High school students grades and credits are due at this time also.

Report card request Form: SC TOP can assist in formatting report cards for members who need official report cards. Equal access participants, court proceedings and students returning to public school may need official report cards.

SECTION 59-65-47: Associations for home schools requirements: READ the SC Code of Laws for yourself so that you are informed of your legal rights and responsibilities:

In lieu of the requirements of Section 59-65-40 or Section 59-65-45, parents or guardians may teach their children at home if the instruction is conducted under the auspices of an association for home schools which has no fewer than fifty members and meets the requirements of this section. Bona fide membership and continuing compliance with the academic standards of the associations exempts the home school from the further requirements of Section 59-65-40 or Section 59-65-45.

The State Department of Education shall conduct annually a review of the association standards to ensure that requirements of the association, at a minimum, include:

- (a) parent must hold at least a high school diploma or the equivalent general educational development (GED) certificate;*
- (b) the instructional year is at least one hundred eighty days;*
- (c) the curriculum includes, but is not limited to, the basic instructional areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, and in grades seven through twelve, composition and literature; and*
- (d) educational records shall be maintained by the parent-teacher and include:
 - (1) a plan book, diary, or other record indicating subjects taught and activities in which the student and parent-teacher engage;*
 - (2) a portfolio of samples of the student's academic work; and*
 - (3) a semiannual progress report including attendance records and individualized documentation of the student's academic progress in each of the basic instructional areas specified in item (c) above.**

By January thirtieth of each year, all associations shall report the number and grade level of children home schooled through the association to the children's respective school districts.

Kindergarten: Under SC law, children who are 5 years old by September 1st are eligible for Kindergarten. The parent may sign a waiver form with the school district, in order to opt out of K5. OR the parent may enroll the student as a homeschooler, registered with an accountability association. SC TOP's fee for K5 is \$15/student.

Curriculum: Choice of curriculum is the sole responsibility of the family. Members are responsible for using sufficient materials to teach their children. SC TOP will not choose the curriculum or purchase it for the family.

Testing: Under the third-option law, testing is not required. Members choose when to test and which test is best for their student. Several local programs offer testing in the spring for anyone who chooses to test their children.

The PSAT should be taken in the 10th or 11th grade. Certain scholarships are awarded based on the 11th grade PSAT scores. **You must register for the PSAT through a local school.** This test is given **only** in October of each school year, but check with the school the preceding spring for directions on registering.

Students should take the SAT or ACT in the fall *and* spring of the junior year. It is vitally important for two reasons: 1) it makes students eligible to apply for scholarships and college admissions and 2) it gives students the opportunity to practice taking the test(s) so that they have time to improve their scores during the senior year. Please refer to any requirements for a specific scholarship you are seeking.

The SAT or ACT can be taken again in the fall of the senior year. Seniors could take it again in the spring if they would like another opportunity to raise their scores. The SAT counts the highest score attained in each segment.

You can register for the SAT on-line at www.collegeboard.com or by calling 1-800-728-7267. You can register for the ACT on-line at www.act.org or by calling 1-800-525-6926.

Please use the SC TOP college board code when registering for tests, so a copy will be sent to our office: 410034

High School:

The weight of responsibility for Homeschooling in High School is sometimes intimidating for parents. SC TOP believes that all homeschoolers want to open the doors of opportunity for their student's future. Good record-keeping is essential—and not as hard as it might seem.

Transcripts: Members are required to maintain their own records, including grade reports. High school grade reports must be submitted by June 5th each year. SC TOP offers complimentary record keeping workshops in the Fall and Spring each year, as well as tutorials throughout the year. SC TOP prepared homeschool transcripts are recognized by colleges and employers. Request a copy of your student's transcript by email at director@sc-top.org.

SC diploma requirements are: 4 English, 4 Math, 3 Science, 1 U S History, 1 Other Social Studies, ½ Government, ½ Economics, 1 Physical Education, 1 Computer Science, 1 Fine Arts, 1 Foreign Language or Occupational Specialty, 6 Electives.

Note: These credits on a homeschool transcript demonstrate an equivalent education that is required for SC graduates. Homeschoolers will not earn a diploma with these credits, though.

Colleges may have different requirements for admissions. Homeschool parents will serve as guidance counselors to ensure that their students have the necessary credits and courses for their desired destination beyond High School. Public school students may graduate with these basic 24 credits up to 32 total—so homeschoolers may also earn credits within that range. Alternative records and portfolios are also useful to demonstrate student's ability and achievement for college admissions or employment opportunities.

Middle School Credits: 7th and 8th grade students may earn high school credits. These credits are usually awarded so that the student may advance to higher levels in core subjects or to free up time for internships in high school years. If you wish to have transcript assistance for these middle school credits, please register for the 9th/10th grade fee. Members may wait till the student is in 9th grade to report the credits for official transcript assistance at that time.

Dual Enrollment: SC TOP students may enroll in college courses to earn high school credits and college credits at the same time. The college may request a letter from SC TOP and the parent stating this permission. Please request the numeric final grade from the instructor so that we can calculate the cumulative GPA.

Honors and AP: South Carolina's Uniform Grade Scale (SC UGS) is weighted so honors and AP credits bump up the GPA. The Department of Ed has established a guideline that demonstrate

honors credit for the public schools. Although the DOE does not oversee homeschools, they do set the tone and standards that are commonly accepted. So, SC TOP members should also be prepared to demonstrate how their honors credits are above and beyond the CP course requirements. AP courses must be approved by College Board. Parent is also responsible to secure the final AP test approval.

100's: SC TOP understands a parent's desire to award 100's for effort. The transcript should reflect the student's true ability and accomplishment, not just how hard the effort. So, if you feel that your child deserves an A, the range includes 90-100. Reserve 100's for effort way above the usual or for extra work accomplished. 100 is perfect. Were they perfect? If they earned the 100 please feel free to award the grade. Parents may be asked to include additional proof of all assigned grades based on participation and worked completed. SC TOP reserves the right to adjust the grade assigned.

Transfer back to public school: Please note if your student wishes to transfer homeschool credits into a public school, the DOE will accept your student but they may or may not accept your homeschool credits. State mandated EOC's are the final exam in these four courses in public school: Algebra 1, English 1, Biology 1 and US History. Some high schools are requiring homeschoolers to take this test in order to accept the transfer credit. Some schools may also require the honors framework guidelines in order to accept the honors value on homeschool credits. SC TOP will format and send official transcripts for you, but the school may still require additional documentation from the parent such as course descriptions, syllabus, and test scores.

Scholarship Information

***NOTE: Rules established by the Commission on Higher Education concerning the LIFE Scholarship, Palmetto Fellows Scholarship and other scholarships change constantly. Please check with CHE and SC TOP for updates. Be very careful of rumors and outdated information in local/online groups.*

Why SC TOP Ranks High School students: SC TOP wants our members to have the same opportunities as any other school choice. Ranking offers opportunities for certain scholarships and college admissions requirements. Class ranking must be assigned on the transcript for scholarships such as Life, Hope and Palmetto Fellows. Ranking reports are finalized before June 15th each year, in accordance with CHE requirements.

Participants who are not seeking college admission or scholarship opportunities are also valuable members in SC TOP. The ranking policy and procedures should not create more work for individuals who are not pursuing rank based opportunities. You never know if your student's goals will change, when ranking may become important and/or necessary. Class ranking participation and deadlines are not-negotiable.

High School Class Ranking policy

As a home school association, we rank all of our High School Students: 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade. SC code of laws considers each independent homeschool as the parent/teacher and the principal. The parents are responsible to generate the grades and transcripts.

- I. In order to ensure equivalent calculation and interpretations of the SC Uniform Grade Scale, SC TOP collects the student transcripts/grade reports from parents by June 5th. Our office will verify the GPA calculations. Our ranking report is generated from our calculations.
 - A. In past years, we have ranked only at the end of the junior and senior years but have updated our policies to reflect the requirements of the scholarship submissions.
 - B. SC TOP will prepare a ranking report for each High school class. SC TOP will also collect records for all incoming 9th graders in order to include any high school level classes in the middle school years.
 - C. The reports will be available by Friday 5:00 pm before the June 15 scholarship submission deadline.
- II. Students with extreme learning exceptionalities (those not doing classes on a high school level) are registered as special education and are not included in the class size or the class ranking. Students with exceptionalities that are participating in high school classes are included in the class size and the class rank.
- III. SC TOP follows the standards set forth on the South Carolina State Department of Education's website when calculating our GPAs according to the Uniform Grade Scale. SC TOP signifies whether the classes are College Prep, Honors or AP/IB/Dual Credit based on the standards set forth.
 - A. College Prep and Elective course credits awarded will be able to demonstrate equivalent value to the State Standard of Objectives.
 - B. Honors credits must be able to produce documentation showing how that class was more rigorous than the college prep level.
 - C. AP/IB/Dual Credit must be able to provide documentation (generally in the form of a transcript) from the entity that issued the credit.

Graduating Seniors:

College bound students should begin applying for scholarships ASAP. Fastweb is a good place to start looking for available scholarships. Also, complete the FAFSA application which is a free application for government aid/loans, awarded on a first come first serve basis. Applications open each year on Oct 1. <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> Watch out for copycat forms with similar names that charge a service fee to "help" you complete the form.

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