

K12 ACADEMICS — REFERENCE SERIES

The Homeschool Handbook

Everything a family needs to begin — the laws, the methods, the curriculum, the community, and the path all the way to college.



Find Your Community
2026 EDITION

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — including the growing number who choose to learn at home.

YOU CAN DO THIS

Homeschooling can feel overwhelming from the outside — but millions of ordinary families do it well every year. This handbook walks the whole path in **ten steps**, from your first question to college applications, with a methods reference along the way.

General guidance, not legal advice. Homeschool laws vary significantly by state and change over time — always confirm current requirements with your state's department of education or homeschool association.

Is Homeschooling Right for You?

WHAT IT IS

Homeschooling means **your family directs the education** — full control over curriculum, pace, values, and schedule. It's legal everywhere and growing fast, but it's a real commitment of time and energy.

BY THE NUMBERS

Legal in all 50

states, plus D.C.

~3–6%

of students, and rising

Any reason

academics, values, flexibility

YOUR MOVE

Honestly weigh your **time, temperament, and finances** — and talk with your child about the change before you leap.

HELPFUL TIP

You can start any time and stop any time — many families homeschool for a **season**, not forever.

Know Your State's Laws

WHAT IT IS

This is the **first thing to nail down**. Requirements vary enormously — some states ask nothing, others require notification, testing, portfolios, or specific subjects.

BY THE NUMBERS

Notify or not

varies widely by state

Testing

required in some states

Records

some states review them

YOUR MOVE

Look up **your state's homeschool law** before you start — state homeschool associations and HSLDA summarize each one clearly.

HELPFUL TIP

"Umbrella" or "cover" schools in some states simplify compliance — and can issue official transcripts and diplomas.

Choose Your Approach

WHAT IT IS

Homeschooling isn't one thing. Families pick a **philosophy** — from structured “school at home” to child-led “unschooling” — or blend several.

BY THE NUMBERS

Many methods

classical to unschooling

Eclectic is common

mix and match

Child-led option

interest-driven

YOUR MOVE

Read the major approaches (see the methods page), then **pick one to start** — you'll adjust as you learn your child.

HELPFUL TIP

Most veteran homeschoolers end up **eclectic**, borrowing what works from several methods rather than following one purely.

Pick a Curriculum

WHAT IT IS

From all-in-one boxed programs to à la carte subjects to online academies to free open resources, there's a curriculum for every budget and style.

BY THE NUMBERS

Boxed or à la carte

structured or mixed

Online academies

teacher-supported

Free resources

libraries, open courseware

YOUR MOVE

Start with **one core program** rather than assembling everything yourself — simplicity beats perfection in year one.

HELPFUL TIP

Don't over-buy. Many families spend **far less** than expected using the library and free open resources.

Set Up Space & Rhythm

WHAT IT IS

Homeschooling needs no classroom — just a workable space and a rhythm. Its superpower is **flexibility**: learning fits your family, not a bell schedule.

BY THE NUMBERS

No classroom

the kitchen table works

Fewer hours

1-on-1 is efficient

Flexible

learn any time of day

YOUR MOVE

Set a **loose daily rhythm** (not a rigid schedule) and protect a consistent start — routine beats intensity.

HELPFUL TIP

Home learning is efficient: one-on-one often covers in **2–4 hours** what a classroom does in 6–7.

Plan & Keep Records

WHAT IT IS

Even where it's not required, keeping records — a portfolio of work, attendance, reading lists, and course descriptions — protects you and builds a transcript later.

BY THE NUMBERS

Portfolio

samples of real work

Attendance

logged in many states

Course records

for a future transcript

YOUR MOVE

Keep a **simple folder** (physical or digital) of work samples, books read, and what you covered each year — nothing fancy.

HELPFUL TIP

These records become the raw material for a **high-school transcript** — start the habit early, even in elementary.

Build Community

WHAT IT IS

The question every homeschooler hears — “what about socialization?” — is very solvable. Co-ops, sports, clubs, classes, and groups provide a rich social life.

BY THE NUMBERS

Co-ops

shared classes & community

Sports & clubs

many welcome homeschoolers

Field trips

learning in the world

YOUR MOVE

Join a **local homeschool group or co-op early** — community is the single biggest predictor of a good homeschool experience.

HELPFUL TIP

Many public schools let homeschoolers join **sports, band, and specific classes** — just ask your district.

Teach the Core Subjects

WHAT IT IS

You don't have to be an expert in everything. Strong programs, online classes, tutors, and co-ops fill any gaps — your job is to **facilitate**, not lecture.

BY THE NUMBERS

Facilitate

guide, don't lecture

Outsource gaps

tutors, online, co-ops

Follow interests

depth over coverage

YOUR MOVE

Prioritize **consistency in reading and math**; let science and history follow curiosity, projects, and real books.

HELPFUL TIP

For subjects you're unsure about (upper math, science labs), **online classes and co-ops** are lifesavers.

Homeschooling High School

WHAT IT IS

High school is absolutely doable at home — it just needs more structure: tracking credits, assigning grades, and building a **transcript** colleges accept.

BY THE NUMBERS

~24 credits

typical for a diploma

Transcript

you create it

GPA

you assign the grades

YOUR MOVE

Map out **four years of courses** to meet college-admission expectations, and keep detailed records of each one.

HELPFUL TIP

Dual enrollment at a community college builds college credit *and* an external transcript that strengthens applications.

The Path to College

WHAT IT IS

Colleges actively **welcome homeschoolers** — the application just leans more on the transcript you built, test scores, and course descriptions.

BY THE NUMBERS

Welcomed

homeschoolers thrive

Transcript + tests

carry more weight

Same aid

FAFSA applies equally

YOUR MOVE

Build a clear transcript, consider the **SAT/ACT** (helpful even where optional), and read each college's homeschool-applicant guidance.

HELPFUL TIP

See our **Admissions** and **Paying for College** playbooks — homeschoolers qualify for all the same financial aid.

Homeschool Methods at a Glance

The major approaches families choose from — most eventually blend several into their own 'eclectic' mix.

Traditional / School-at-Home

Structured, textbook-based, mirrors a classroom — familiar and easy to start.

Classical

The trivium — grammar, logic, rhetoric stages — built on great books and deep discussion.

Charlotte Mason

Living books, nature study, narration, and short, focused lessons.

Unit Studies

One theme (say, Ancient Egypt) explored across every subject at once.

Montessori

Hands-on, child-paced learning in a carefully prepared environment.

Unschooling

Child-led and interest-driven, with no set curriculum — learning through life.

Eclectic

A personalized mix of methods — what most experienced families settle into.

Online / Virtual

Accredited, teacher-supported programs delivered fully online.

LEARNING, YOUR WAY

Find Your Community.

Homeschooling thrives on community. Find co-ops, curricula, online programs & support — among **1,297 free guides** and 200+ directories at K12 Academics.

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