

Homeschooling Toolkit

Every parent wants the best education for their children. While the Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) does not recommend one particular school or educational model over another, some of our families have found homeschooling to be an appropriate way to educate their child with autism. This guide is intended to provide information about homeschooling in North Carolina and to direct parents to resources to assist them in making an informed decision about whether homeschooling might be the right choice for their child and family. An ASNC Autism Resource Specialist may be able to provide you with additional contacts and resources related to homeschooling in your local area. Another way to connect with other homeschoolers is to check out your local [ASNC Support Group](#). Support Groups are welcoming places where you can meet other parents on the autism journey and gather additional insight.

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FAQs about Homeschooling in North Carolina

If you are new to the world of homeschooling, you probably have a lot of questions. These are answers to a few of the most commonly asked questions about homeschooling in North Carolina:

Do I need to be a certified teacher?

No. The only requirement is that the parent who will be the teacher has a high school diploma or its equivalent. There are no additional requirements for educating a child with special needs, including autism. Be sure to read over the information provided by the NC Division of Non-Public Education about homeschools found [here](#).

Do I need to follow a specific curriculum?

No. It is recommended that you provide your child with instruction in the core subjects that are appropriate for their grade level, but there are no state requirements regarding curricula for homeschools. It is, however, a good idea to review the minimum courses required to obtain a high school diploma in North Carolina so you can adequately plan for your child's education.

Can I work and homeschool my child?

This is a tough one. Some parents do manage to provide a home-based education while also working, but the time challenges can be significant. A homeschool does not need to follow a regular school calendar as long as you operate it for at least nine months of the year, so you can spread out instruction over evenings, weekends, and through the summer to work around scheduling conflicts. The homeschool is not required to prove hours in session, but state law does require you document and maintain an annual attendance record per student.

What if my child receives state (Medicaid-based) services and is homeschooled?

Medicaid-based services provided under the Innovations Waiver, 1915i and other state-funded services are usually restricted during the public school instructional or in-person learning hours. However, services are approved for after public school hours, school vacation schedules, holidays, etc. If it is better suited for your child to receive services

during public school hours, then make a request to your local provider agency. Once you share your homeschool's operating schedule, your provider may be allowed to provide services during those exempt school day hours.

Homeschooling in North Carolina has been redefined to allow "parents or legal guardians or members of either household determine the scope and sequence of academic instruction, provide academic instruction, and determine additional sources of academic instruction." This change to the law allows homeschools and families more flexibility in getting instruction from other sources. It is still recommended that the parent or guardians provide some of the instruction, but the law now allows for co-ops, tutors, specialists, and other experts as additional sources of instruction, as well as apprentice programs and outside-the-home educational activities, according to the [Home School Legal Defense Association](#).

Is a homeschool exempt from testing?

No. Homeschools are required to administer a nationally standardized achievement test or other nationally standardized equivalent measurement annually. There is no requirement specifying the month to test. So even if you begin to homeschool in the middle of the year or later – you must have your homeschool student tested. Children with special needs may not be exempted from annual testing, but the homeschool administrator (that's you, the parent) can select the test you feel is appropriate to your child's level of academic functioning, regardless of age or grade in school. Furthermore, there are no minimum scores that a child must achieve for the homeschool to continue to operate. So, while standardized testing is required for each enrolled homeschool student, the NC public school's required End-of-Grade tests are not a requirement for homeschool students.

How will a homeschooled child be socialized?

This is a common concern about homeschooling. While it is true homeschooled children will spend less time amongst peers than they would in a conventional school setting, this does not mean they will grow up without becoming socialized. As the parent, you have the ability and opportunity to introduce your child to positive social experiences that may be

more meaningful for a child with autism than simply spending a lot of time in a group. Refer to the “Opportunities for Social Activities” section below for some ideas.

If my child with autism had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) in public school, can they continue to receive special education (EC) services at home?

Maybe; however, they would likely be minimal. Homeschooled students are not eligible for an IEP because they have opted out of a public education. You may be able to obtain services like speech therapy on a very limited basis through your school district. Refer to the “Special Education Services” section below for more information.

Can a homeschooled child attend college?

Yes! Many children who have been homeschooled can and do go on to college. In fact, some college admissions agents believe that homeschoolers arrive with a greater passion for learning and better critical thinking skills than students who were educated in conventional schools. If you believe that college may be in the future for your child, be sure to familiarize yourself with college admissions requirements when designing a curriculum.

Reasons to Consider Homeschooling

There are many different reasons a parent might choose to homeschool their child with autism. The specific factors involved in making the decision will vary depending on the unique needs of the child, but there are certain considerations that are often at the heart of this decision. Here are some reasons to consider homeschooling:

Individualized education

Children with autism often have uneven academic development that can be hard to address in a large classroom setting. Homeschooling allows tailoring of the curriculum to offer enrichment in the child’s areas of strength while nurturing growth in areas of challenge. For many children, individualized instruction is more effective than group instruction.

Learning style of the child

Homeschooling allows parents the flexibility to match their educational approach to the unique learning style of their child. Many students with autism respond well to visual strategies and other multi-sensory learning techniques such as the use of manipulatives. In a homeschool setting, parents can introduce a wide variety of materials and match the pace of instruction to the child's needs. They can also provide opportunities for their learner to generalize skills across domains.

Safety/Bullying

Sometimes there are safety concerns for children with autism in public or private schools. Concerns might include the child running away, the inability of a nonverbal or minimally verbal child to tell parents about incidents at school, or other issues regarding their safety on the school grounds or on the school bus. Bullying is a serious concern for students across the autism spectrum and can be one of the primary reasons that a family elects to homeschool.

Emotional health of the child and family

For some children with autism, homeschooling can greatly reduce anxiety and improve their emotional health because they are in a safe environment. Parents may find that homeschooling reduces their stress over their child's education while also fostering relationships within the family.

Dissatisfaction/Frustration

Unfortunately, not every family has the most productive relationship with their child's school. Frustration over IEP services, appropriate placement, behavior management, and other issues sometimes reaches a breaking point. Some parents feel their time would be better spent educating their child rather than fighting with a school.

Additional reasons

There are many additional reasons why homeschooling might be a good option for a child with autism. These include meeting sensory needs, reducing distractions, removing social complexities from academics, using special interests to motivate, accommodating a special diet, and the benefits of a flexible schedule.

Potential Challenges of Homeschooling

The decision to homeschool your child is not to be made lightly. While homeschooling can have many benefits, there can also be difficulties. These are some of the potential challenges of homeschooling:

Time commitment

Deciding to educate your child at home requires a time commitment, even with the use of additional teaching experts. Carefully weigh your other obligations before starting a homeschool. Be sure to factor in other children and your spouse/partner, employment, volunteer work, chores, recreation, and personal time for yourself.

Loss of income

In some cases, it is not feasible for the parent providing instruction to also be employed, at least not full time. If homeschooling would mean giving up your employment, it is important to first consider the impact that the loss of income would have on your entire family.

Parent-child relationship

Consider how well you and your child work together. Homeschooling requires time working directly with your child on a daily basis, which has the potential to be frustrating and can test the patience of both parent and child. Some parents do a trial run over the summer to see how well it goes before making the commitment to homeschool full time. The option to hire additional experts may reduce the time you spend in direct instruction. However, homeschooling still requires a high level of personal involvement.

Cost

Depending on how you decide to homeschool, it can be quite cost-effective or extremely expensive. The most costly form of homeschooling is usually a private virtual school online or hiring homeschool and instructional experts. Other families invest in pre-packaged curricula that can be fairly expensive. There can also be costs for additional books and supplies, tutors, and enrichment activities. Some parents save money by sharing materials with other families, making their own instructional materials, and purchasing used curricula.

Lack of support

While homeschooling is growing across the United States, lack of support can still be a barrier for some families. Parents may face opposition from extended family members who believe they are doing their child a disservice by opting to homeschool. It may be difficult to find the support of like-minded families and other community resources to support them in their efforts to homeschool their autistic child. Remember that an [ASNC Autism Resource Specialist](#) may be able to help you find resources and support within your community. Your local [ASNC Support Groups](#) can also be a place to find support for your parenting choices.

Objections from the child

Not every child is eager to be schooled at home, and if they do not “buy in” to homeschooling, it can be a very long and difficult road. Conflict may also arise if the child is unwilling to respect the role of the parent as teacher or is uninterested in learning the material presented.

Strengths and weaknesses of the parent

Your own organizational ability, creativity, patience, and available time should all be considered before deciding to homeschool. Also be sure to honestly assess your interest in becoming your child’s primary educator. Some parents genuinely enjoy teaching their child with autism, while for others homeschooling may be more of a chore than a joy. There is not one right or wrong answer – it is about what works best for your family.

Burnout

Burnout is a serious challenge facing many families who homeschool their child with autism. A significant time investment can be required to plan lessons, prepare materials, and actually work with your student day after day. Sometimes parents feel like they never get a break. Field trips, tutors, and other enrichment activities provide a refreshing change of pace and some down time for the parent who homeschools.

Starting a Homeschool in North Carolina

Starting a homeschool in North Carolina is a fairly easy process; however, there are certain legal requirements you must meet to ensure compliance with state laws regarding compulsory school attendance. Homeschools in North Carolina are overseen by the [North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education](#) (NCDNPE). These rules apply to children who are at least seven years old but not yet 16 years old.

Requirements for Homeschools in North Carolina

The following information is excerpted from the [NCDOA Homeschool Requirements and Recommendations](#) page and includes tips from ASNC.

Parents/guardians residing in North Carolina and desiring, in lieu of conventional school attendance, to homeschool their children who are at least age 7 but not yet age 16 (age 18 if student wishes to obtain / retain a driver's license) must:

- **Hold at least a high school diploma or its equivalent.**
- **Send to NCDNPE a Notice of Intent to Operate a Homeschool.** The notice must include the name and address of the school along with the name of the school's owner and chief administrator. This notice informs the State of North Carolina of your intent to homeschool. It is not requesting permission to do so. If all questions are answered on the Notice of Intent form, including the submission of required documents (high school or college diploma) for all adults named on lines 8 and 9, then acceptance of your notice of intent is automatic. Although NCDNPE prefers to have the notice of intent completed online, you may instead submit your documents and information by mail.

Tip: Do not withdraw your child from their present school or begin your school until you have received written acknowledgment from NCDNPE that your completed Notice of Intent to Operate a Home School form has been received.

Tip: This notice informs the State of North Carolina of your intent to homeschool. It is not requesting permission to do so. If all questions are answered on the Notice of Intent form, including the submission of required documents (high school or college diploma) for all adults named on lines 8 and 9, then acceptance of your notice of intent is automatic.

Tip: Although NCDNPE prefers to have the notice of intent completed online, you may instead submit your documents and information by mail.

Tip: Be aware that NCDNPE does not allow for the name of a homeschool to be changed, so be sure to choose one that will look serious on a future high school diploma or college application. If you do not fill in the name of your school on your Notice of Intent Form, then NCDNPE will assign one to you. Check [NCDNPE's guidelines](#) on naming your school.

- **Elect to operate under either Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 39 of the North Carolina General Statutes as a religious or as a nonreligious school.**
- **Operate the school on a regular schedule**, excluding reasonable holidays and vacations, during at least nine calendar months (180 school days) of the year.

Tip: A homeschool does not need to follow a regular school calendar as long as you operate it for at least nine months of the year, or the equivalent of 180 school days. This means you can spread out instruction over evenings, weekends, and through the summer to work around scheduling conflicts, if you prefer. In addition, the law does not require a specific number of instructional hours per day.

- **Maintain at the school disease immunization and annual attendance records for each enrolled student.**

Tip: You are required to keep an attendance record for each enrolled student. NCDNPE provides a form you may use [here](#), but you are not required to use that NCDNPE form.

- **Have a nationally standardized achievement test administered annually to each student.** The test must involve the subject areas of English grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics. Records of the test results must be retained at the

homeschool for at least one year after testing and made available to NCDNPE when requested. The first standardized test must be administered within the academic year of the home school start date, and then annually thereafter.

Tip: The law does not empower school officials to enter your home without permission, nor mandate your attendance at records review meetings officiated by school officials.

- **Notify NCDNPE when the school is no longer in operation.**

Tip: It is important to notify NCDNPE of a change in your county, mailing address or telephone number. Once you decide to close or terminate your homeschool, call the NCDNPE office or use their online "Home School Closure Notification Form."

Types of Homeschools

North Carolina recognizes two basic categories of home schools. Parents must declare their school to be either religious or nonreligious when they register with NCDNPE. The state requirements for homeschooling are the same for both. Parents can then determine how they wish to structure their homeschool. Options to consider are:

- **Traditional:** A traditional homeschool consists of home-based instruction for a child or children from one family. A parent or guardian is the primary director of the homeschool education and should provide some of the instruction. The parent is the Chief Administrator for the homeschool. Tutors, experts, and group instruction are options for homeschool education in core subjects, remediation, electives, and enrichment. There is no state-mandated curriculum for homeschools. Since the homeschool grants the high school diploma, NCDNPE strongly recommends that all records, grades, and work product from grades 9-12 are permanently retained.
- **Cooperative (Co-op):** A cooperative homeschool is where families come together to provide learning experiences for their children. The parent from one family can be the primary instructor, parents can choose to share the teaching duties, or parents can retain experts and outside assistance in teaching. In North Carolina, a cooperative homeschool is limited to children from two families; to include more families, the school must register as a private school and follow all related regulations. Be aware that NC childcare laws can affect your homeschool co-op. More at <https://www.nche.com/how-nc-child-care-law-affects-homeschool-co-ops/>.

- **Virtual School (distance learning):** Online schooling or e-schooling is an increasingly popular option among homeschool families. The advantages of virtual schooling include less instruction by the parents and a set curriculum. The disadvantages can be the cost, the pace of instruction, and the lack of flexibility.

How to Get Started with Homeschooling

Parents who are considering homeschooling should take the following steps:

- Explore your options. Talk to other parents in your area who homeschool. Read books and visit websites for more information.
- Consider both the potential benefits and challenges of homeschooling.
- Make a plan.
- File your notice of intent to open a homeschool with The NC Division of Non-Public Education at <https://ncadmin.nc.gov/divisions/non-public-education/home-schools/file-notice-intent-operate-home-school>.
- Inform your child's school of your plan to homeschool, but do not officially withdraw your child from school until you have received written confirmation that NCDPNE (North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education) has received your notice of intent form!
- Request a copy of your child's cumulative files from their school.

Supplementary Educational Resources for Homeschoolers

North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS): This public-school charter offers online courses for K-12 students. Like other state charter schools, there is no cost to the student for tuition. Full time enrollment is required. More information at: <https://ncva.k12.com/>.

- **Dual Eligibility:** [Career College Promise \(CCP\)](#). This initiative offers eligible high school students the ability to pursue a two- or four-year degree, a certificate, or a diploma. If the student maintains a "B" average and meets other eligibility requirements, then college level courses are tuition free and may be added to their high school transcript while also being counted towards college credit.
- **NCVPS Virtual Advantage:** A supplementary program that serves middle and high school students across the state, as well as being available to out-of-state schools. The homeschool or private school student is required to pay for enrollment/courses. Unlike the virtual charter school, the NCVPS Virtual Advantage program allows students to participate in the program, yet keep their status as

homeschool or private school students. The NCVPS / supplementary program is not the school of record for the homeschool or private school. It does not provide credits, school course transcripts, or grant diplomas. It does provide an enrollment grade verification (EGV) document, which can be helpful to confirm the course recording on the student's homeschool transcript.

- **Private Tutors and Group Lessons:** Tutors can be hired, but homeschool advocates still recommend that parents directly participate in the instruction of some core topics. Sometimes families share the expense of hiring a tutor or other experts or to provide access to special materials (such as a science lab for chemistry). Apprentice programs and organized educational programs (such as 4-H) may also qualify as part of instruction.
- **Colleges and Universities:** Homeschooled students are permitted by the State of North Carolina to be enrolled part time in college or university level courses as may be appropriate.
- **Conventional K-12 Schools:** Public school access includes participation in classes, activities, sports, etc. Access is determined by the individual school or school district and varies across our state. First, contact the school authorities about the district's policies. You may want to start with the principal of the school to see if the homeschool student can possibly participate in classes or activities. As a rule, current policies and regulations do not allow homeschool students to play sports on public school teams.

Opportunities for Social Activities

A frequently raised concern is how a child who is homeschooled will become socialized. As we know, children on the autism spectrum typically have social challenges, so it is important to offer them sufficient opportunities to practice social skills and make friends. Homeschooling can allow parents to include their children in as many social activities as they like, while maintaining involvement and providing support for the child as appropriate.

Many local homeschool groups organize regular activities, educational field trips, and other outings. The culture of homeschooling in many communities tends to be generally accepting of unique individuals who do not fit the traditional mold. These supervised

gatherings can be an opportunity to involve your child in social situations in a way that may feel more comfortable for an anxious child or one who was previously bullied.

Ideas for social activities for your homeschooled child include:

- Homeschool club group outings and field trips.
- Homeschool days or special classes at museums, gyms.
- Parks and Recreation activities, such as autism-specific classes or social clubs and group activities that match your child's interests. Classes such as Lego robotics or other STEM-related topics can be a good fit.
- Private group lessons for music, horseback riding, martial arts; in some communities, there are group lessons especially for children on the autism spectrum.
- Scouting, church groups, and volunteering.

Special Education Services

If your child with autism was in a public school system, they may have had an IEP (Individualized Education Program) outlining special education services they should receive. Students whose parents choose to remove them from public school to homeschool are **not** eligible for services detailed within an IEP. However, your child may be able to receive some special education services through your school district on a very limited basis.

Under the section of the federal special education law IDEA called "Child Find," local school districts are obligated to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who live within their district, whether or not the child attends a public school. Child Find covers children from birth to age 21. However, this does not mean your local school district is always obligated to provide services for children with disabilities whose parents have opted to homeschool.

Parents should contact their local school district's [Exceptional Children Division](#) (EC) to refer their child for consideration; that request should be in writing (an email is sufficient), and parents should follow up in a week if they have not been contacted by the district.

The referral request should include a reason why the child needs help, if the child has been diagnosed with a disability, and a description of the difficulties the child is having with learning, speech, motor skills, etc.

The school will schedule a referral meeting to gather information from the parent including any medical, educational, and testing information the parents can provide. The referral process is the same as it is for a student who is enrolled in a public school. The IEP team will review the parents' concerns, existing data, and any testing provided by the parent to determine if evaluations are necessary. If the team determines testing is necessary, the needed evaluations will be determined by the suspected area of eligibility. The 90-day timeline is the same for initial evaluations.

IDEA makes provisions for a small funding pool for services for non-public school students called "Proportionate Share Funding," which lays out a formula for allocating funding based on the number of identified children with disabilities in the school district. The school district has the right to allocate this limited funding in the way it believes will serve the greatest number of students. Unlike with an IEP, the district is not required to meet the unique needs of the student. For instance, a district could determine it only has enough money to provide speech and language therapy to nonpublic students. If your homeschooled child needed something other than speech therapy, it might not be available through the school district. And once the Proportionate Share Funding money is depleted for the year, it is gone.

Special Education Scholarship Grants for Students with Disabilities

Families who remove their child with a disability from public school and decide to enroll them in a homeschool (or a private school) may be eligible to apply for a [special education scholarship grant](#). Funds for students who are homeschooled may, under some circumstances, be used to help pay for needed services to support the student's ability to learn, such as speech and language therapies, occupational therapies, tutoring, adaptive special education equipment, and more. The Education Student Accounts (ESA+) Program

requires first-time applicants to submit a NC Eligibility Determination Document from an NC IEP dated within the last three years.

- Eligibility for the program is very specific and details can be viewed on the [NC Education Assistance Authority website](#).
- To see whether your child qualifies and to apply for the scholarship program(s), go to <https://www.ncseaa.edu/k12/> or call the NC Education Assistance Authority at 1-855-330-3955.

How to Get Back into Public School

Sometimes families try homeschooling for a while and decide it is not right for them. Or you may feel your child with autism is now ready to enter public school. Perhaps your child has requested to return to their old school. Whatever the reason, you always have the option to close your homeschool and re-enroll your child in the local public school.

These are the steps to take if you wish to transition your child back into public school:

- Make an appointment with the principal of your base school. The decision for grade level placement rests with the principal.
- If appropriate, schedule an IEP meeting to do the necessary assessments and determine the appropriate placement for your child. Remember, as the parent you are an equal partner of the IEP team!
- Introduce your child to the school campus and the staff. Books and social stories may help ease the transition.
- Notify NCDNPE of your intent to close your homeschool. You have the option of re-opening your homeschool at a later date by filling out a Notice of Intent to Re-Open a Home School form.

Conclusion

Homeschooling is just one of several educational choices offered to parents in North Carolina. Hopefully, after reading through this toolkit you will have a better understanding of the pros and cons associated with homeschooling. If you are not sure whether homeschooling is a good fit, then continue to research other educational options to make the best choice for your child and family. Resources such as [North Carolinians for Home Education](#) (NCHE), [Home School Legal Defense Association](#) (HSDLA), and other sites can be helpful. If you have further questions regarding homeschooling or other educational

concerns, please reach out to your local Autism Resource Specialist (ARS) for assistance by calling 800-442-2762 or by visiting the ASNC [Talk with a Specialist page](#).