



Autism Society of NORTH CAROLINA

Homeschooling Children with Autism

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 help you make an informed decision about whether homeschooling might be the right choice for your child and your family. An ASNC [Autism Resource Specialist](#) may be able to provide you with additional contacts and resources related to homeschooling in your local area. Your local [ASNC Chapter](#) can also be a place to connect with others who homeschool and gather additional insight.

FAQs about Homeschooling in North Carolina

If you are new to the world of homeschooling, you probably have a lot of questions. These are the 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.

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 his or her 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 plan for your child's education appropriately.

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.

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 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 annually. Children with special needs may not be exempted from annual testing, but the

homeschool administrator (that's you, the parent!) can select the test that 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, it is not the high-stakes testing that takes place in public schools.

How will a homeschooled child be socialized? This is a very common concern about homeschooling. While it is true that homeschooled children will spend less time amongst peers than they would in a conventional school setting, this does not mean that they will grow up without becoming socialized. As the parent, you have the ability 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. See the section "Opportunities for Social Activities" below for some ideas.

If my child with ASD had an IEP in public school, can he 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. See the section "Special Education Services" 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 that a parent might choose to homeschool their child with autism. The specific factors that go into the decision will vary depending on the unique needs of the child, but there are certain considerations that are often at the heart of matter. These are some of the reasons to consider homeschooling:

Individualized Education: Children with ASD often have uneven academic development that can be hard to address in a large classroom setting. Homeschooling provides the ability to tailor 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 ASD respond well to visual strategies and other multi-sensory learning techniques such as the use of manipulatives. In a homeschool setting, parents are able to 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 ASD 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 that their time would be better spent educating their child 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 some considerable challenges. 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, 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 to test your patience. Some parents do a trial run over the summer to see how well it goes before making the commitment to homeschool full time. With the option to hire additional experts, you may be able to balance the time spent directly instructing your child, but you will still be much more directly involved in providing their instruction than before.

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 who believe they are doing their child a disservice by opting to homeschool. They may also find it difficult to find the support of like-minded families and other community resources to support them in their efforts to homeschool their child with ASD. Remember that an [ASNC Autism Resource Specialist](#) may be able to help you find resources and support within your community. Your local [ASNC Chapter](#) 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 can 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 ASD, while for others homeschooling may be more of a chore than a joy. There is no 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 ASD. A significant time investment can be required to plan lessons, prepare materials, and actually work with your student day after day, and sometimes parents feel like they never get a break. Field trips, tutors, and other enrichment activities can help to provide a 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, but 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](#) or DPNE. These rules apply to children who are at least 7 years old but not yet 16 years old.

Requirements for Homeschools in North Carolina (from the DPNE website)

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 DNPE a Notice of Intent to Operate a Home School. The notice must include the name and address of the school along with the name of the school’s owner and chief administrator;
- 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 of the year”;
- Maintain at the school disease immunization and annual attendance records for each student;
- 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 and made available to DNPE when requested;
- Notify DNPE when the school is no longer in operation.

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

Tip: The DNPE does not allow for the name of a homeschool to be changed, so be sure to choose one that will look serious on a high school diploma or college application.

Tip: Remember to register for the [Homeschool Discount Card](#) from the NC DNPE.

Types of Homeschools

There are several basic types of homeschools that you can operate in North Carolina. Parents must declare their school to be either religious or nonreligious when they register with DPNE. You can also decide between a traditional homeschool or a distance learning program, such as an Internet-based virtual school. These are the options for homeschools in North Carolina:

Traditional: 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. As the homeschool grants the high school diploma, DPNE strongly recommends that all records, grades, and work product from grades 9-12 are permanently retained.

Co-operative: A co-operative homeschool is when 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 co-operative 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.

Virtual School (Distance Learning): Online schooling or e-schooling is an increasingly popular option among homeschool families. There is not a full-time, public e-school available to North Carolina students, but there are a number of private options. 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:

1. Explore your options. Talk to other parents in your area who homeschool. Read books and visit websites for more information.
2. Consider both the potential benefits and challenges of homeschooling.
3. Make a plan.
4. Inform your child's school of your plan to homeschool, but **do not** withdraw your child from school until you have received written confirmation that DPNE (the North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education) has received your notice of intent form!
5. Request a copy of your child's cumulative files from their school.
6. Contact the NC Division of Non-Public Education at www.ncdnpe.org to file your notice of intent to open a homeschool.

Supplementary Educational Resources for Homeschoolers

North Carolina Virtual Public School: This is a program that offers online courses to high school students enrolled in a public school in North Carolina. While most courses are not directly offered to homeschooled students, those students may be eligible to participate in NCVPS courses through their local school district's Visiting Students program. If a family is interested in enrolling their homeschooled child in a NCVPS class, they should contact their local school system. School administrators may decide to grant access to their NCVPS registration system, in which case student grades are reported by NCVPS to the local school system. School districts are permitted to charge fees for enrollment of a homeschooled student in NCVPS. NCVPS also offers a very limited number of courses directly to homeschooled students for a fee. Current offerings include SAT prep and a couple of science classes.

Private Tutors and Group Lessons: Tutors can be hired, but homeschool advocates still recommend that parents do some of the core education. 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.

UNC School of Education Carolina Center for Educational Excellence: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers several science classes especially for homeschooled students. There are courses for elementary, middle school, and high school age children. If you do not live in the Triangle, your local [ASNC Chapter](#) or [Autism Resource Specialist](#) may be able to help you find similar opportunities in your area.

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: Children ages of 7-16 can enroll part time in a conventional school (such as their neighborhood public school) for non-core subjects, if allowed by school officials. Homeschooled children who are 16 years or older may also take core subjects at a conventional school on a part-time basis.

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 "quirky" or unique individuals who do not fit the traditional mold. These supervised gatherings can be a way 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, etc.
- Parks & Recreation activities, such as ASD-specific classes or social clubs and group activities that match your child's interests. Classes such as Lego robotics or rocketeering can be a good fit.
- Private group lessons for music, horseback riding, martial arts, etc. In some communities, there are group lessons especially for children on the autism spectrum.
- Scouting, church groups, and volunteering in the community

Special Education Services

If your child with autism was in a public school system, he may have had an IEP (Individualized Education Program) outlining special education services he or she was to receive. Students whose parents choose to remove them from public school to homeschool are **not** eligible for 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 locate children with disabilities who live within their district. This does not mean, however, that your local school district is always obligated to provide services for children with disabilities whose parents have opted to homeschool.

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 in an IEP, they are not required to meet the unique needs of the student. For instance, a district could determine that they only have 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.

Parents who wish to have their homeschooled child with ASD considered for special education services should write to the director of special education in their local school district. In North Carolina, special education is called the [Exceptional Children Division](#), or EC for short. If your request is deemed to be reasonable, your child will be evaluated and a determination will be made whether or not he or she is a child with a disability who requires specially designed instruction. Again, this may or may not result in your child receiving any therapy or special education. If services are offered, they will be detailed in a service plan, not an IEP.

Special Education Scholarship Grants for Students with Disabilities

Families whose child with a disability was previously enrolled in a public school, and who decide to remove him for homeschooling (or private schooling), may be eligible to apply for a special education scholarship grant. The scholarship grant is for up to \$6,000 annually (\$3,000 per semester). For students who are homeschooled funds 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, and adaptive special education equipment.

Eligibility for the program is very specific and can be viewed in detail on the website of the NC Education Assistance Authority at <http://www.ncseaa.edu/CDSG.htm>. In general, to qualify for the scholarship, children must:

1. Have been in a public school the previous semesters (or if entering Kindergarten or First Grade from pre-school, have been receiving special education services through the public school),
2. Have been determined to be a child with a disability by the public school system. Students with a disability have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or are in the process of having an IEP drawn up and have been receiving special education services at least 75 days of the school semester.
3. Be re-evaluated by the public schools every three years to continue to qualify for the credit. The re-evaluation will be paid for by the public school. Children may qualify through high school, up to the age of 22; the credit does not count for college education.

To see whether your child qualifies and to apply for the scholarship grant, go to <http://www.ncseaa.edu/CDSG.htm> 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 that it is not right for them. Or you may feel like your child with ASD is now ready to enter public school. Or perhaps your child has requested to return to his 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
- Schedule an IEP meeting to do the necessary assessments and determine the appropriate placement for your child. Remember that you as the parent 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 DNPE of your intent to close your homeschool. You have the option of reopening your homeschool at a later date by filling out a Notice of Intent to Re-Open a Home School form.

Support and Resources for Homeschooling

There are numerous supports and resources available for families who homeschool, both in North Carolina and on the national level. These are a few to consider:

North Carolina Homeschooling Resources:

North Carolinians for Home Education: (<http://nche.com/>) Hosts of the largest statewide homeschool conference in North Carolina each year, their website has a large amount of information about homeschooling and links to local support groups.

North Carolina Families Learning Together: (<http://www.2011.fltn.com/>): They organize gatherings for homeschooling families across North Carolina and share information among membership.

Homeschool Alliance of North Carolina: (<http://www.2011.ha-nc.org/>) A group committed to empowering homeschoolers across North Carolina and helping them make informed decisions.

Autism Society of NC Person County Chapter:

(<http://personcoautismsnc.webs.com/homeschoolingandautism.htm>) An ASNC chapter that provides information about autism and homeschooling, with helpful tips and plenty of resources.

National Homeschooling Resources:

Homeschool World: (<http://www.home-school.com/groups/NC.html>) A national group, they also have a list of homeschool groups across North Carolina.

Weirdkids.com: (<http://weirdkids.com/autism/aut2bhome.htm>) An email chat group for parents who homeschool children with autism to discuss practical matters related to homeschooling like methods, curriculum, IDEA, and autism therapies.

Homeschooling Kids With Disabilities: (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hkwd/>) A Yahoo group for parents homeschooling children with special needs.

Twice Exceptional Homeschooling Resources:

Gifted Homeschoolers Forum: (<http://www.giftedhomeschoolers.org/2eresources.html>). A comprehensive guide for parents whose children are homeschooling gifted children, including those with ASD (called twice exceptional or 2e). They also have information on college for the homeschooled student.

2e Newsletter: (<http://www.2enewsletter.com/>) The most comprehensive source for information about twice exceptional (2e) students no matter where they are educated. They have a free email newsletter about 2e in the news that is chock full of information and links to interesting articles. The “Spotlight on 2e Series” is a collection of short books about twice exceptional children. The Twice-Exceptional Child With Asperger Syndrome is one of the available titles.

Christian Homeschooling Resources:

Almaden Valley Christian School: (<http://www.almadenvalleychristianschool.com/?id=fag>) Educational consulting for homeschooling special needs children with a Christian emphasis. Their FAQs about homeschooling provide practical answers to the “how to” of working with your child.

PREACCH (Parents Rearing and Educating Autistic Children in Christian Homes):
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PREACCH/> A Yahoo group for parents who operate religion-based homeschools for their children with autism.

National Challenged Homeschoolers Association Network (<http://www.nathhan.com/>): A resource for Christian families homeschooling special needs children.

Structured Teaching Resources for Homeschooling Children with Autism:

Tasks Galore: (<http://tasksgalore.com/>) Based on the TEACCH principles of structured teaching, Tasks Galore shows how to present academic materials in a visual, multi-sensory manner for a child with autism. The Tasks Galore books are also available at the ASNC Bookstore.

Workbox System: (<http://www.workboxsystem.com/index.html>) A homeschooling curriculum based on the principles of structured teaching.

Building Blox: (<http://www.buildingblox.net/home.html>) Free examples of structured teaching activities and other autism teaching tools.

Books About Education and Homeschooling:

The Autism Society of North Carolina bookstore (http://www.autismbookstore.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=SFNT&Store_Code=ASNC) is an excellent place to find books about autism, education, and homeschooling. These are some titles that others have found helpful:

Homeschooling the Child With Autism: Answers to the Top Questions Parents and Professionals Ask by Patricia Schetter and Kandis Lighthall: Guide to help parents of children with ASD decide if they should homeschool,

what program would be most appropriate, and how to address social, behavioral, and organizational concerns.

Choosing Home: Deciding to Homeschool With Asperger's Syndrome by Martha Kennedy Hartnett and Stephen M. Shore: Information designed to help parents decide if they should opt to homeschool their child with Asperger Syndrome.

Homeschooling the Child With Asperger Syndrome by Lisa Pyles: An upbeat book full of tips and practical advice about designing a customized study program for your child with Asperger's.

The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School and Get a Real Life and Education by Grace Llewellyn: A "how to" manual for getting the most out of unschooling and homeschooling, particularly geared towards teens.

1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism or Asperger's by Ellen Notbohm and Veronica Zysk: An extremely useful book packed with practical tips for use across home and educational environments. It is organized by topic (behavior, sensory, etc.) for quick reference.

The Mislabeled Child by Brock Eide: Addresses the twice exceptional (2e) child and how to work with their unique learning styles. Helpful for parents of academically gifted children with ASD.

Distance Learning Resources:

Distance Learning Resource Network: (<http://www.wested.org/cs/wew/view/pj/57/>) DLRN provides tools and technical assistance related to distance education.

American School: (<http://www.americanschoolofcorr.com/>) Distance learning curriculum in both paper and online formats.

Babbage Net School: (<http://babbagenetschool.com/index.html>) Virtual interactive school.

The Cambridge Academy: (<http://www.thecambridgeacademy.org/>) Private online academy serving pre-k - 12th grade.

Clonlara Home Based Education Program: (<http://www.clonlara.org/home/>) Home based K-12 instruction with individualized curriculum; gifted and special needs students welcomed.

CompuHigh: (<http://www.compuhigh.com/>) Year round virtual interactive high school.

Florida Virtual School: (<http://flvs.net/Pages/default.aspx>) A public online school in Florida which also offers e-schooling for 6 – 12 grade homeschooled students nationwide.

Francis School: (<http://www.francisschool.com/default.asp>) An online high school designed for students to fill in missing credits needed to complete their high school diploma.

The George Washington University Online High School: (<http://www.gwuohs.com/>) Online private college preparatory high school.

K-12: (<http://www.k12.com/>) The largest provider of online education in the U.S. In some states, K-12 e-schooling is available as a free public school option. That is not currently the case in North Carolina, however

students can enroll in the K-12 International Academy accredited online private school.

Laurel Springs: (<http://www.laurelsprings.com/>) Online accredited college preparatory K-12 school.

Moore Homeschooling: (<http://www.moorehomeschooling.com/>) Personalized curriculum designed to balance academics with work and service to others. Consultation available for working with special needs children. A more traditional homeschool curriculum – not Internet-based learning.

Oak Meadow: (<http://oakmeadow.com/index.php>) Offering both homeschool curriculum and an accredited teacher supported distance learning school for K-12.

SeaScape Center: (<http://seascapecenter.com/>) Full year homeschool distance learning curriculum for Pre-k – 12 grade.