

TENNESSEE

- Compulsory Attendance Ages:** “between six (6) years of age [at the beginning of the academic year, per Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 0520-01-03.03(10)(a)] and seventeen (17) years of age, both inclusive.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3001(c)(1). A parent or guardian who believes their child is not ready to attend school at age six may apply to the principal of the public school which the child would attend for a one semester or one year deferral in required attendance. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3001(c)(5). Section 49-6-3001(c)(2) also exempts from the compulsory attendance law any child who has received a diploma or certificate of graduation from high school, is enrolled in an approved GED program or has received a GED certificate, or is enrolled in a home school and has reached the age of 17 years. The truancy laws of Tennessee are applicable to children and parents who enroll their child in a public school for more than six weeks, even though the child is less than six (6) years of age. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3007(g).
- Required Days of Instruction:** 180 days. Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 49-6-3004, 49-6-3050(b)(3), 49-50-801(d).
- Required Subjects:** None.

Three types of schools may be used for private home education:

Option 1: Independent Home School. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(b). “A home school is a school conducted or directed by a parent or parents or legal guardian or guardians for their own children.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(a)(1). (Options 2(a) and 2(b), below, are also considered home schooling under this definition.)

1. Parents must submit a notice of intent to the local superintendent prior to each school year “for the purpose of reporting only.” The notice of intent must include the names, number, ages and grade levels of children involved, location of the school, curriculum to be offered (no particular subjects required), the proposed hours of instruction, and the qualifications of the parent-teacher. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(b)(1).
2. Parents must maintain attendance records, which are subject to inspection by the local superintendent. The records must be submitted to the superintendent at the end of each school year. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(b)(2).
3. Instruction must be given four hours a day for 180 days. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(b)(3).

4. Parents must submit proof of vaccination as required by Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-5001 or “a signed, written statement that the immunization and other preventive measures conflict with the parent’s or guardian’s religious tenets and practices.” Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 49-6-3050(b)(7), 49-6-5001(b)(2).

Option 2: Church-Related School. Parents or guardians may enroll their children in a church-related school and teach them at home. A “church-related school” is “a school operated by denominational, parochial or other bona fide church organizations that are required to meet the standards of accreditation or membership of the Tennessee Association of Christian Schools, the Association of Christian Schools International, the Tennessee Association of Independent Schools, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Tennessee Association of Non-Public Academic Schools, the Tennessee Association of Church Related Schools, the Tennessee Alliance of Church Related Schools, or a school affiliated with Accelerated Christian Education, Inc.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-50-801.

There are three distinct ways of homeschooling under a Church-Related School:

- a. Associate with a Church-Related School. “Home schools that teach kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12), where the parents are associated with and students are enrolled with a church-related school, as defined by § 49-50-801 . . . are exempt” from the independent home school requirements above. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(a)(2)(A).
- b. Participate as a Parent-Teacher in a Church-Related School. “A parent-teacher may enroll the parent’s home school student or students in a church-related school as defined in § 49-50-801, and participate as a teacher in that church-related school. Such parent-teacher shall be subject to the requirements established by the church-related school for home school teachers and exempt from the rest of [the provisions of] this section.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(a)(3).
- c. Operate a Satellite Campus of a Church-Related School. Parents may have their children attend a church-related school where the home is a satellite or extension of the church-related school. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-50-801. The Tennessee Department of Education recognized this option in a memorandum from the Commissioner of Education to superintendents and directors of schools dated February 18, 1999.

Option 3: Category III Distance-Learning School. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3001(c)(3)(A)(iii). Parents or guardians may homeschool their children by enrolling them in a Category III non-public school that offers distance learning. “Category III” schools are accredited by one of the six regional accrediting associations (e.g., the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) “according to the procedures and criteria established by the association.” Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 0520-07-02-.04.

Category III schools must report the names, ages, and addresses of all pupils in attendance to the director of the public school system in which the student resides. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3007 Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 0520-07-02-.04.

Teacher Qualifications: Option 1: The parent-teacher must have a high school diploma or a GED.

Option 2a: If parents conducting a home school are associated with a church-related school, there are no qualifications for teaching grades K-8, but parents must have a high school diploma or GED to teach grades 9-12. § 49-6-3050(a)(2)(B). Beyond that, qualifications are determined by the church-related school where the child is enrolled.

Options 2b and 2c: Qualifications are determined by the church-related school where the child is enrolled.

Option 3: Qualifications are determined by the school in which the child is enrolled.

Tutor Qualifications: “In the event of the illness of a parent-teacher, or at the discretion of the parent-teacher, a tutor, having the same qualifications that would be required of a parent-teacher teaching the grade level or course, may be employed by the parent-teacher.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(c).

Standardized Tests: Option 1: Grades 5, 7 and 9 must take a standardized test administered by the commissioner of education or someone designated by him or by a professional testing service approved by the local education agency. Tests administered by the Commissioner must be without charge. “Tests administered by a professional testing service shall be administered within thirty (30) days of the date of the statewide test,” and are “administered at the expense of the parent-teacher.” The parent may be present when the home school student is in grade 5. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(b)(5)(A)–(B). If a home school child “falls six (6) to nine (9) months behind [his] appropriate grade level in [his] reading, language arts, mathematics or science test scores,” the parent must “consult with a teacher licensed by the state The parent and teacher shall design a remedial course.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(b)(6)(B).

Option 2(a): When parents associate with a church-related school, the school must “administer or offer standardized achievement tests,” but no particular grade levels for testing are specified in the law. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3050(a)(2)(A).

Options 2(b) and 2(c): No testing required by statute.

Options 3: No testing required by statute.

Religious Freedom Law: Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-1-407 (enacted July 1, 2009).

Recognition of High School Diplomas from Church-Related Schools and Home Schools.

“(a) Notwithstanding any rule, regulation or other law to the contrary, a high school diploma awarded by a school as defined by § 49-50-801 or § 49-6-3050 in recognition of completion of secondary educational requirements shall be considered by all departments, agencies, commissions or other such entities of state and local government as having all the rights and privileges of a high school diploma awarded by a public school system. (b) This section shall not apply to state lottery proceeds as provided in title 49, chapter 4, part 9.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 1-3-118.