

Home Schooling in Gallatin County – Frequently Asked Questions

What are the legal requirements to home school in Montana?

Montana has compulsory enrollment laws¹ that require children to attend public school unless enrolled in a nonpublic (private) or home school. Montana law² defines a home school as the instruction by a parent of his child, stepchild, or ward in his/her residence. To qualify students for exemption from compulsory enrollment, a home school must³:

- 1) maintain records on pupil attendance and disease immunization and make them available to the county superintendent of schools on request;
- 2) provide at least the minimum aggregate hours of pupil instruction required by public schools;
- 3) be housed in a building that complies with applicable local health and safety regulations;
- 4) provide an organized course of study that includes instruction in the subjects required of public schools as a basic instructional program; and,
- 5) notify the county superintendent of schools of the county in which the home school is located in each school fiscal year of the student's attendance at the school.

How do I notify the county superintendent?

In Gallatin County parents who wish to home school notify the County Superintendent by completing a Home School Notification Form available from the Superintendent's office. This form must be submitted to the Superintendent each year that a child is home schooled.

Do I have to notify the county superintendent if my child is six or younger or older than 16?

If a child is six years of age or younger or is older than 16 years old at the start of the school year, home school notification is not required.⁴ A child who is 7 years of age must be enrolled in school until the later of the following dates: a) the child's 16th birthday; or b) the date of completion of 8th grade. While not required, parents are encouraged to provide notification for children over age 16 until they graduate from high school. In this case the Superintendent can verify a student's completion of high school, which is often required for college admission, military service, and Social Security benefits.

Is there a deadline to notify the county superintendent?

The law⁵ states that a parent, guardian, or other person shall enroll his child in school within the first week of the school term or when he establishes residence in the school district. Parents should notify the Superintendent of their intent to home school by the start of each school year or earlier if possible. Children that are neither enrolled in public school or in a legal nonpublic or home school are deemed truant. Truancy may result in the prosecution of the parent including criminal penalties and fines.

¹ [20-5-102](#), MCA. Compulsory enrollment and excuses.

² Ibid.

³ [20-5-109](#), MCA. Nonpublic school requirements for compulsory enrollment exemption.

⁴ [20-5-102](#), MCA. Compulsory enrollment and excuses.

⁵ Ibid.

If my child is attending a public school, can I withdraw him/her mid-year to home school?

Parents may home school at any time during the school year by providing notification of intent to home school to the County Superintendent. Upon submitting notification, parents should contact the school in which their child was attending and officially withdraw him/her from school. The Superintendent's office issues a verification card to parents that can be presented to their children's school if needed, but does not contact schools when families opt to home school.

How many hours of instruction are required?

Home schools must provide at least the minimum aggregate hours of instruction⁶ as public schools. The required hours of instruction by grade per year⁷ are as follows:

- Kindergarten: 360 hours (720 hours for full-time Kindergarten);
- Grades 1-3: 720 hours;
- Grades 4-12: 1,080 hours.

Is there a start and stop date to the school year?

By law⁸, the school year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. Home schools may determine the time, place, and method of instruction and can set their own start and stop dates anytime within that period.

Do I have to take attendance?

Home schools are required to maintain records of pupil attendance and disease immunization (including medical or religious exemptions) and make them available to the county superintendent on request.⁹ At the completion of the school year, parents must provide verification to the Superintendent that they have met the minimum hours of instruction as required by law.

What subjects are required to be taught?

Home schools must provide an organized course of study that includes instruction in the subjects required of public schools as a basic instructional program. The basic education program for each grade level can be found in the Standards of Accreditation in the Administrative Rules of Montana and are summarized below:

- Elementary (Grades K-6): An education program that enables students to meet content standards and content-specific grade-level learning progressions.¹⁰
- Middle School (Grades 7-8): Students shall complete one unit* in the following program areas each year: English language arts, social studies, mathematics, physical and life sciences; and one-half unit in health enhancement. Students must be allowed to elect

⁶ [20-5-109](#), MCA. Nonpublic school requirements for compulsory enrollment exemption.

⁷ [20-1-301](#), MCA. School fiscal year.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [20-5-109](#), MCA. Nonpublic school requirements for compulsory enrollment exemption.

¹⁰ [10.55.901](#), ARM. Basic Education Program: Elementary.

one-half unit from the following program area offerings: visual arts, music, career and technical education, and world languages and cultures.¹¹

- High School (Grades 9-12): The basic education program shall be at least 20 units* of coursework in the following program areas: (4) units of English language arts; (2) units of mathematics; (2) units of social studies; (2) units of science; (1) unit of health enhancement; (1) units of arts; and (1) unit of career and technical education.¹²

**A unit of credit is defined as at least 8,100 minutes for one school year.*

Where do I get textbooks and curriculum?

In Montana parents are solely responsible for the educational philosophy of the home school and the selection of instructional materials, curriculum, and textbooks.¹³ Numerous resources for home school curriculum materials and textbooks are available online and elsewhere. The Superintendent's office maintains a variety of resources for parents and can be contacted for assistance.

Do I have to use an accredited program?

Parents are responsible for providing an organized course of study and are not required to use an accredited program at any grade level. The choice to use an accredited program could be a consideration, however, if a student plans to enter a public high school at a later date. Public high schools follow an educational program accredited by the State of Montana, which includes required units of coursework and credit hours. Using a non-accredited curriculum could be problematic if the public high school does not recognize the coursework and credits earned in a non-accredited program. Parents are advised to contact their local public high school to discuss schooling options if they are considering enrolling their children in the future.

Does my child have to take standardized tests?

Students enrolled in nonpublic and home schools are exempted from state-mandated assessments and standardized tests. Parents who are interested in having their children assessed may find options for standardized testing online and through home school organizations or by contacting their local school district.

Do I have to give grades and report cards?

Parents are solely responsible for the evaluation of home school instruction and must maintain records of their children's academic progress.¹⁴ Montana requires that all schools keep, in secure storage, a permanent file of student records that includes the student's name and address, his/her parent or guardian, birth date, academic work completed, level of achievement (grades, standardized tests), immunization records, attendance data, and course work delivered through correspondence, extension, and distance learning, adult education, summer school, work study, specially designed courses, and challenges to current courses.¹⁵

¹¹ [10.55.902](#), ARM. Basic Education Program: Middle Grades.

¹² [10.55.904](#), ARM. Basic Education Program Offerings: High School.

¹³ [20-5-111](#), MCA. Responsibilities and rights of parent who provides home school.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ [10.55.909](#), ARM. Student Records.

Can home school students participate in extracurricular activities in the public schools?

For students in grades K-8, the decision to allow home school students to participate in sports/activities has been left to local school districts. Due to a recent change in the law¹⁶, home-schooled high school students can participate in public school extra-curricular activities. The student and his/her entire family must live in the public school's attendance area; there is no transfer or out-of-attendance area participation for home school students. Parents are advised to contact their school district of residence for information.

Will my child receive a high school diploma?

Parents have the option of providing home school graduates with their own high school diploma upon completion of the Montana high school graduation requirements.

Who issues a high school transcript?

The high school transcript is the official record of the courses and credits completed by a high school student. Unless a student is enrolled in a program that will produce a transcript, parents are responsible for providing their students with high school transcripts. At a minimum, the high school transcript must include: the student's legal name, address, gender, and date of birth; school name, address, and phone number; student grade level; student entry date and exit date; course code, course title, course grade, and credits earned for each school term and course taken; grade point average; graduation date; and the required number of credits for graduation.¹⁷

If my child has a disability, can he/she receive special education services through the public schools?

Home school students may or may not be eligible to receive special education services through their local public school district. Parents are encouraged to contact their local school district to see what, if any, special education services may be available.

What are federally-funded programs?

Public school districts are required to contact private and home schools within their boundaries concerning the opportunity to participate in federally funded education programs. Federal programs include the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title grants, Carl Perkins Technical Education, and others. Nonpublic and home schools may be eligible to receive equitable services through these programs through their local school districts.

¹⁶ Montana 67th Legislature [Senate Bill 157](#).

¹⁷ [10.55.911](#), ARM.