

REACH the TOP (RTT)

Handbook

REACH—support group

REACH is an acronym for Resources, Encouragement and Activities for Columbia Homeschoolers. REACH was started with the goals of offering resources that enhance homeschooling, providing encouragement and support for homeschooling parents, and promoting activities for all homeschooled students. REACH is open to all homeschoolers, regardless of religious preference, race, color, or national/ethnic origin.

The Third Option Participants (TOP)—accountability

REACH the TOP (RTT) is an add-on option to include legal accountability for members of REACH support group. 3rd option accountability groups trust parents to maintain their records and pursue the child's educational best interests. RTT does not want to interfere with parents rights about their choices. We hold each other accountable to the minimum standard of the law. But, 3rd option doesn't mean you have to figure it all on your own. By keeping RTT under the REACH umbrella, we encourage our membership to be local. It limits our group geographically. We don't think we can adequately service homeschoolers from every corner of the state. If we all belong to the same support group, we have a better chance of being personally acquainted with each RTT member. Our paths will cross more often.

How to Join REACH the TOP:

Application and Fees: The first step is to complete the REACH application. We believe this is such an important step—you cannot skip it! Once the REACH membership process has been completed, you will find the RTT accountability application in the member's only section of the website. RTT membership is an upgrade added on to the basic REACH membership. It is only available for members of REACH support group—and we welcome new and returning members!

Fees: \$10/student before August 1st

\$15/student after August 1st

Optional: transcript preparation \$25 available upon request

Optional: RTT T-shirts: \$10/each & RTT Totebags: \$5/small or \$10/large

Coming soon optional: Student ID's for High School students

The fees of RTT cover the end of the year program: A Celebration of Learning which recognizes all the accomplishments of RTT students throughout the year and honors our graduates. The fees also cover the overhead fees of RTT (including the PO Box, website, and director's compensation). Discount requests because of financial hardship or families with more than 4 students may be considered by submitting the inquiry to rtt@reachgroup.org.

Withdrawing from another school or accountability group: It is the applicant's responsibility to notify the school when withdrawing their children from a school. Schools will want a copy of the member letter for their records. Members should keep the original member letter in their records. New members may also request a withdraw letter copy for the school to be included in the welcome packet. Parents should be prepared to submit all books and materials back to the school when notifying the school of transferring to homeschool. You can request school records to be transferred over to you at that time. Some schools will prefer to send the records later. Parent is the school official and is the designated recipient of the school records.

We also ask members to notify previous accountability director that you will be transferring your membership to RTT. It is a courtesy we would ask when our members transfer from us, too.

RTT applications are open all year. However, the application is only available by request after April 15th. RTT will not permit late spring memberships of truancy or excessive absences, failing grades or other related issues. Applicants who are moving or have health issues may apply.

Membership Letter/Welcome Packet: Once the RTT application is processed, the welcome packet will be issued and mailed. The welcome packet contains: a welcome letter briefly explaining RTT policies, an official pressure sealed membership letter, a wallet card.

Wallet Card: signifies compliance with RTT, can be used to obtain retailer discounts that recognize teachers.

Membership Letter: The member letter is a very important document. It is the document that you will need to take to the DMV for drivers licenses and free admission to the state museum. It is your official proof for legal compliance and should be kept where you can access it anytime during the year.

**The membership letter should be sufficient documentation for the DMV. However, some locations have asked for another format of the letter (actually containing the same information). RTT can issue a DMV letter to any member upon request.

Calendar Year: The membership year is from July 1 to June 30 each year to conform to public school attendance dates. Annual renewals coincide with REACH support group renewals. Homeschooling families are still able to set their own school calendars as long as they complete the compliance forms by the June 5th. The law requires 180 days. Many of our members homeschool more than 180 days, but it is only necessary to document 180.

Homeschoolers should be registered with an accountability association by the 10th day after the start of public school where they are zoned. If the homeschool is not registered by that time, they can be reported as truant. So, RTT recommends that participants register by the 1st of August. Members who join by then, also receive a discount rate for early registration. That discount is the reward for legal compliance!

Compliance Forms and Records:

In order to maintain our status as an approved homeschool association, RTT files an annual standards assurance form in compliance with the SC Department of Education. RTT members comply with this by completing 180 day forms verifying they have maintained the following records as specified in the “3rd Option” law. The parent must have a GED or higher education.

Your curriculum must include, but not limited to, the areas of reading, writing, math, science and social studies, and for grades seven and above, composition and literature. *You may use curriculum packages from specific publishers, an eclectic approach – pick and choose among many different publishers for your curriculum, or a student-directed learning approach with library and Internet materials.*

- You must keep records. The records must include:
 - a plan book, diary, or other record indicating subjects taught and activities in which the student and parent-teacher engage;
 - and a portfolio of samples of student’s academic work;
 - and a semiannual progress report including attendance records and individualized documentation of the student’s progress in each of the required academic areas.

You may also use your own format of record keeping: teacher planning books, notebooks for diary narratives (a different book for each child), or record keeping software. The portfolio is a sampling of work, not every paper.

Keep these in your files; do not send to RTT. Members may request FREE evaluation of their records. RTT can offer suggestions for improvement and encouragement. These records should be meaningful to the individual member. They serve to inspire and encourage yourself on days when the going gets tough. The records should demonstrate progress over time.

The compliance form is also completed at 90 days (submitted by January 5th), to touch base with members mid-year. RTT reports the number of students enrolled in each school zone by the end of January. This compliance form verifies that members are still homeschooling, they have not enrolled in another school or moved out of state. It also reminds everyone the legal requirements, so that anyone needing assistance can gather the necessary records for compliance before the end of the year.

SECTION 59-65-47: Associations for home schools requirements: READ the SC Code of Laws for yourself so that you are informed of your legal rights and responsibilities:

In lieu of the requirements of Section 59-65-40 or Section 59-65-45, parents or guardians may teach their children at home if the instruction is conducted under the auspices of an association for home schools which has no fewer than fifty members and meets the requirements of this section. Bona fide membership and continuing compliance with the academic standards of the associations exempts the home school from the further requirements of Section 59-65-40 or Section 59-65-45.

The State Department of Education shall conduct annually a review of the association standards to ensure that requirements of the association, at a minimum, include:

- (a) *parent must hold at least a high school diploma or the equivalent general educational development (GED) certificate;*
- (b) *the instructional year is at least one hundred eighty days;*
- (c) *the curriculum includes, but is not limited to, the basic instructional areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, and in grades seven through twelve, composition and literature; and*
- (d) *educational records shall be maintained by the parent-teacher and include:*
 - (1) *a plan book, diary, or other record indicating subjects taught and activities in which the student and*

- parent-teacher engage;*
- (2) a portfolio of samples of the student's academic work; and*
- (3) a semiannual progress report including attendance records and individualized documentation of the student's academic progress in each of the basic instructional areas specified in item (c) above.*

By January thirtieth of each year, all associations shall report the number and grade level of children home schooled through the association to the children's respective school districts.

Kindergarten: Under SC law, children who are 5 years old by September 1st are eligible for Kindergarten. The parent may sign a waiver form with the school district, in order to opt out of K5. OR the parent may enroll the student as a homeschooler, registered with an accountability association. RTT's fee for K5 is the same for all students.

Curriculum: Choice of curriculum is the sole responsibility of the family. Members are responsible for using sufficient materials to teach their children. RTT will not choose the curriculum or purchase it for the family. REACH support group is a great resource to find out about various curriculum options. REACH hosts a used curriculum sale each year in June as community service for all homeschoolers.

Testing: Under the third-option law, testing is not required. Members choose when to test and which test is best for their student. Several local programs offer testing in the spring for anyone who chooses to test their children.

The PSAT should be taken in the 10th or 11th grade. Certain scholarships are awarded based on the 11th grade PSAT scores. **You must register for the PSAT through a local school.** This test is given **only** in October of each school year, but check with the school the preceding spring for directions on registering.

Students should take the SAT or ACT in the fall *and* spring of the junior year. It is vitally important for two reasons: 1) it makes students eligible to apply for scholarships and college admissions and 2) it gives students the opportunity to practice taking the test(s) so that they have time to improve their scores during the senior year. Please refer to any requirements for a specific scholarship you are seeking.

The SAT or ACT can be taken again in the fall of the senior year. Seniors could take it again in the spring if they would like another opportunity to raise their scores. The SAT counts the highest score attained in each segment.

You can register for the SAT on-line at www.collegeboard.com or by calling 1-800-728-7267. You can register for the ACT on-line at www.act.org or by calling 1-800-525-6926.

Please use the home school code when registering for tests.

PSAT - 994199

ACT - 969999

SAT – 970000

HSLDA & SCHEA

HSLDA: Home School Legal Defense Association <http://hsllda.org/> provides legal representation in court for homeschoolers. SCHEA: South Carolina Home Educator's Association <http://scea2.azurewebsites.net/> is our legislative watchdog group that works to protect the rights of homeschoolers in SC. RTT does not offer group discount rates nor requires our members to join either of these organizations. Individuals wishing to apply can do so via the web links provided.

High School:

The weight of responsibility for Homeschooling in High School is sometimes intimidating for parents. RTT believes that all homeschoolers want to open the doors of opportunity for their student's future. Good record-keeping is essential—and not as hard as it might seem.

Transcripts: Members are required to maintain their own records, including grade reports. High School credits should be documented on a transcript. RTT and parent prepared homeschool transcripts are recognized by colleges and employers. RTT offers complimentary record keeping workshops in the Fall and Spring each year, as well as tutorials throughout the year. Members who prefer to have transcripts prepared for them can request this service at rtt@reachgroup.org for an additional fee. RTT needs a copy of the transcript submitted along with the 180 compliance forms, so we can verify the calculations of the GPA and ranking, *submitted by June 5th each year.*

SC requires these credits for a diploma: 4 English, 4 Math, 3 Science, 1 U S History, 1 Other Social Studies, ½ Government, ½ Economics, 1 Physical Education, 1 Computer Science, 1 Fine Arts, 1 Foreign Language or Occupational Specialty, 6 Electives. These credits on a homeschool transcript demonstrate an equivalent education that is required for SC graduates. Homeschoolers will not earn a diploma with these credits, though.

Colleges may have different requirements for admissions. Homeschool parents will serve as guidance counselors to ensure that their students have the necessary credits and courses for their desired destination beyond High School. Public school students may graduate with these basic 24 credits up to 32 total—so homeschoolers may also earn credits within that range. Alternative records and portfolios are also useful to demonstrate student's ability and achievement for college admissions or employment opportunities.

Dual Enrollment: RTT students may enroll in college courses to earn high school credits and college credits at the same time. The college may request a letter from RTT and the parent stating this permission.

100's: RTT understands a parent's desire to award 100's for effort. The transcript should reflect the student's true ability and accomplishment, not just how hard the effort. So, if you feel that your child deserves an A, the range includes 93-100. Reserve 100's for effort way above the usual or for extra work accomplished. 100 is perfect. Were they perfect? If they earned the 100 please feel free to award the grade. Parents may be asked to include additional proof of all assigned grades based on participation and work completed. RTT reserves the right to adjust the grade assigned.

Scholarship Information

***NOTE: Rules established by the Commission on Higher Education concerning the LIFE Scholarship, Palmetto Fellows Scholarship and other scholarships change constantly. Please check with CHE and RTT for updates. Be very careful of 2nd hand information.*

Why RTT Ranks High School students: RTT wants our members to have the same opportunities as any other school choice. Ranking offers opportunities for certain scholarships and college admissions requirements. Class ranking must be assigned on the transcript for scholarships such as Life, Hope and Palmetto Fellows. Ranking reports are finalized before June 15th each year, in accordance with CHE requirements.

Participants who are not interested in these opportunities are also valuable members in RTT. The ranking policy and procedures should not create more work for individuals who are not pursuing rank based opportunities. You never know if your student's goals will change, when ranking may become important and/or necessary. Class ranking participation and deadlines are not-negotiable.

High School Class Ranking policy

As a home school association, we rank all of our High School Students: 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade. SC code of laws considers each independent homeschool as the parent/teacher and the principal. The parents are responsible to generate the grades and transcripts.

- I. In order to ensure equivalent calculation and interpretations of the SC Uniform Grade Scale, RTT collects the student transcripts/grade reports from parents by June 5th. Our office will verify the GPA calculations. Our ranking report is generated from our calculations.
 - A. In past years, we have ranked only at the end of the junior and senior years but have updated our policies to reflect the requirements of the scholarship submissions.
 - B. Beginning this year (2013-2014), RTT will prepare a ranking report for each High school class. RTT will also collect records for all incoming 9th graders in order to include any high school level classes in the middle school years.
 - C. The reports will be available by Friday 5:00 pm before the June 15, 2014 scholarship submission deadline.
- II. Students with extreme learning exceptionalities (those not doing classes on a high school level) are registered as special education and are not included in the class size or the class ranking. Students with exceptionalities that are participating in high school classes are included in the class size and the class rank.
- III. RTT follows the standards set forth on the South Carolina State Department of Education's website when calculating our GPAs according to the Uniform Grade Scale. RTT signifies whether the classes are College Prep, Honors or AP/IB/Dual Credit based on the standards set forth.
 - A. College Prep and Elective course credits awarded will be able to demonstrate equivalent value to the State Standard of Objectives.

- B. Honors credits must be able to produce documentation showing how that class was more rigorous than the college prep level.
- C. AP/IB/Dual Credit must be able to provide documentation (generally in the form of a transcript) from the entity that issued the credit.

Graduating Seniors:

REACH and RTT co-sponsor the end of the year program to honor our seniors. This program is an informal, fun and memorable—so plan to attend and invite family and friends. We need a current photo (and optional baby photo) of the graduate along with a paragraph (or 2 or 3) of the student’s homeschool experience, accomplishments and plans for the future. Every graduate has an interesting story that serves to inspire younger homeschoolers toward the end goal—as they follow the examples of excellence.

College bound students should begin applying for scholarships ASAP. Fastweb is a good place to start looking for available scholarships. Also, complete the FAFSA application as soon as this year’s taxes are completed. FAFSA is a free application for government aid/loans, awarded on a first come first serve basis. <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> Watch out for copycat forms with similar names that charge a service fee to “help” you complete the form.

RTT can stamp your transcripts with our official seal. We also have a transcript template to help you create a professional transcript. We will rank all graduating seniors, so please be prepared to report the final GPA, by June 5th.