

This issue

Introduction to the Diploma **P.1**Frequently Asked Questions **P.2**Appendix **P.10**

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

Introduction

Choices, choices! Choosing a school-leaving diploma/certificate in South Africa can be a daunting task as there are plenty (great!) options available. And it can be tempting to fall back into old comfort zones and not explore what is readily (and easily) available. This article explores the American High School Diploma option and answers your Frequently Asked Questions.

Different

The United States of America (USA) has one of the top educational systems in the world¹. Like the South African (CAPS/IEB) and British (Cambridge) matric routes, American High School Diploma is regarded in South Africa as a NQF level 4 qualification which can grant you access to higher (tertiary) education / job opportunities.

Furthermore, with a large and well established home-schooling community in the USA, plenty of excellent resources have been developed over the years and are readily available to our local students. Numerous of these courses have been designed to fit the home-schoolers' needs and is/have been extensively applied by South African families/cottage schools. The rise of online resources in the face of the pandemic is even more prevalent.

What Diploma newcomers should know...

¹ [Best Countries for Education | US News Best Countries](#)

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

What is the American High School Diploma?

The American High School Diploma (hereafter called Diploma), is the preferred and the official school leaving document issued by North American academies/schools. The Diploma is required for college admission, military acceptance, and usually employment purposes.

On completion of the high school graduation requirements, the student is awarded a:

- Transcript (report) of all high school subjects completed and grades obtained through the high school years,
- A High School Diploma.

Graduation requirements vary by:

- US jurisdiction (region/state/district), and
- There typically are also different requirements for the different pathways/level of high school graduation

The latter is similar to what we have with the South African and Cambridge systems, where not all matric qualifications are even, and not all matric qualifications will grant you access to universities for further studies.

Typically, the following types of Diplomas are offered²:



For the Diploma, a student is required to:

- complete a predetermined number of subjects
- over four years (from Grade 9 to 12, although it can be done quicker or at an earlier age)
- in high school-level courses such as English, Maths, Science, and Social Studies. More about this later.

² Naming convention might change between different jurisdictions/schools/academies

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

What are the key characteristics of the Diploma?

A key characteristic of the Diploma is to develop well-rounded individuals through exposure to various subject areas. Mastery of subject content is furthermore promoted, and the pass rate for subjects is typically 70%+ (dependent on your academy/school of choice). This high pass grade is balanced with a supportive educational philosophy where the focus is on helping the student succeed.

Its flexibility, the high quantity and quality of resources, and the freedom of choice on many levels make the Diploma unique.



Is the Diploma accepted at local (South African) universities?

Yes, it is. To be admitted, students will typically do the College Prep Diploma, and need to note the following:

- Just as for any other foreign qualification, if you seek admission to a South African university, it is important to comply with the legal requirements associated with the relevant country's qualification. Further information on the SA Matriculation Board's Diploma requirements can be found in *Appendix A*.
- A second (and important) step for all school leavers is to ensure that you meet the requirements of the university of choice, and then specifically the relevant faculty.

Good news!
Diplomas completed by SA students have been accepted by local universities for studies such as veterinary science and engineering

To summarize, for admission to a local university, your steps would then be to:

1. Complete your accredited Diploma (potentially with an accompanying SAT/ACT score).
2. Apply for conditional exemption through our Matriculation Board.
3. Use this exemption with your Diploma for application to the local university.

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

What are the graduation requirements of a Diploma student?

As discussed, certain graduation requirements need to be met to qualify for a Diploma. To gain a better understanding of what the Diploma consists of, consider the following:

Diploma general requirements

- A Diploma is typically completed over a 3-5 year period (yes, time flexible!) and by the age of 18. Note that there are exceptions to this.
- The Diploma typically consists of high school level subjects taken from Grades 9-12.
- Full-year subjects are called credits and awarded 1 credit. It is possible to earn 0.5 credits for a half-year course. A credit is defined as 150-180 hours of a high school-level course.
- The amount of credits required for graduation is dependent on the student's Diploma pathway (i.e. is university-bound or not), and as determined by the region/jurisdiction. For university-bound students, a minimum of 21-24 credits (5-7 credits per annum) is typically required.
- The Diploma consists of core, elective and a couple of required (regional/school-specific) subjects.
- If the student has a high enough GPA, a student may be allowed to take dual enrollment (thus NQF Level 5 subjects) from his/her Junior year (Grade 11).

Core Courses

- These form the core of the Diploma around which the remainder of the course choices is structured.
- Typically, these are the most academically rigorous courses.
- The nature and content of the core subjects are fairly flexible and is dependent on the student and the school/academy through which you work.
- Core subject areas and the typical number of credits of each required for the Diploma are:
 - English (4 years), thus typically one English course during each year (Grade 9 to 12).
 - Maths (3-4 years), i.e. integrated maths such as Singapore, or Algebra I/II, Pre-Calculus.
 - Science (3-4 years), i.e. Physical Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Science.
 - Social Science (2-4 years), i.e. History, Geography, Economics, Business Studies.

Elective Courses

- These courses can be taken in the areas of interest or where further development is needed.
- They may include further core courses too.

Further Required Courses

- Further course requirements are typically included in accredited Diplomas. The nature thereof is dependent on the academy/school of choice, and may include:
 - Foreign language (typically two consecutive years required for US college admission). And yes, Afrikaans is allowed (depending on your academy/school).
 - Physical Education (1 credit).
 - Health (0.5-1 credit).
 - Performing Arts (0.5-1 credit).
 - Additional for some: Computer and Speech (0.5-1 credit).

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

Will my student who excel academically have access to rigorous courses?

Students can take honors-level courses for added rigor.

Alternatively, he/she can do college-level courses whilst still in high school. These college-level courses can count both towards your high school credits as part of your Diploma, and towards an Associates Degree!

College-level courses are numerous and includes AP and dual enrollment courses. These courses are usually undertaken during a student's Grade 11-12 years.

What is the GPA?

Your high school student's GPA - or Grade Point Average – is a number which indicates how well you scored on average in all your Diploma courses. For the American High School Diploma, this scale is from 1.0-4.0.

Together with a student's SAT/ACT score, the GPA is typically considered for academic scholarships by US universities. Interestingly, there are numerous methods to calculate your GPA. These may include:



- Weighted / unweighted
- Using only core subjects in the GPA calculation.

For more information, view this article: [How Do You Calculate Your GPA?](#)

When do I start with the Diploma?

This really depends on the student and your family, but most students start with the Diploma in the year where they turn 15 (thus, the Grade 9 year). Similarly, many students choose to enrol with an academy/school in the years before the Diploma is commenced to ensure that all the academic building blocks are in place (especially in subjects such as English, mathematics, science, and social studies).

For the university-bound student, Grade 9 core courses will typically be on the following level:

- English: Gr 9+ level English
- Mathematics: Algebra I or higher
- Science: Physical Science (Gr 9) or Biology
- Social Studies: Gr 9+ level course

My student is not university-bound. Can he/she still do the Diploma?

Yes, you can. This is typically defined as a Career Training/Minimal Diploma. The graduation requirements for this type of Diploma are usually less academically orientated than that for the university-bound student.

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

Please note that, if you are considering studying further through a college / tertiary institution (not university) with this Diploma, it would still be wise to ensure that you meet the institution's acceptance requirements with the Diploma (i.e. considering the required subject choices).



My student has learning differences. Can he/she still do the Diploma?

This might depend on the nature of these learning differences and your academy/school of choice, but specialized support is definitely available. This is actually one of the areas in which some of the Diploma service providers excel. Be sure to enquire from your academy/school what their support involves.

Who offers the Diploma to South African students?

We are fortunate that plenty of options exist. In South Africa, you can choose between:

- Brick & Mortar Schools
- Online Schools / Academies
- Umbrella Academies

Of these, popular options for South African homeschoolers (at the time of writing of this article) are:

Umbrella Schools		Online Schools	
With South African operations	Without South African operations	With South African operations	Without South African operations
Home Life Academy with local offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversio Learning• Kairos Academy SA	Bridgeway Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active Home Education Institute• Educ8 SA• Home Life Academy• Pure Life Academy• Southern African Virtual School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acellus Academy• Alpha Omega Academy• University of Nebraska High School• Also, consider: 30 Best Online High Schools for 2021

How do I choose an Academy/School?

We are spoiled for choice with plenty of great options, and several of the available academies/schools might be a good fit for you and your students. Thus, try to eliminate those that are less of a fit first. Your choice boils down to what will suit your child/family the best, and there might be a couple that fits this bill. Consider including the following in your decision-making process:

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

Accreditation

- Will your student be applying for a SA university? It is then imperative to choose a USAf acknowledged accredited academy/school.
- Note that only academies/schools can be accredited, and not your resources (course material).
- A key benefit of using an academy/school with accreditation is peace of mind that it is accountable to a higher institution to maintain a high standard of education.

Course offerings

- A huge advantage of the Diploma is the large number of subjects and related course offerings available to us.
- View the course offerings of the academy/school, and determine if this is in line with your student's interest and needs, and will fulfil the requirements of the student's intended tertiary aspirations.
- Plenty of creation based and secular material is available.
- Consider if you want to do have your material fully online or per textbook, or a combination thereof.
- Are you restricted to a particular starting date, and in the case of classes, will these fit your schedule?
- Would you have access to Dual Enrollment / AP courses through your academy of choice?
- And how will progress against course objectives be monitored and assessed?

Cost

- Even with an unfavourable exchange rate, the Diploma can be very cost-effective.
- The cost of education will depend on your choice of academy/school and/or the intended courses and extramural.
- The cost between options varies greatly. The cheapest I've personally encountered which will grant you access to apply for university admission in SA, is \$175 per family per annum, excluding materials.
- Various good online options are also available in the \$1300-2500/annum range.



Flexibility

- Some providers are very flexible, and you can enrol anytime, do your work from anywhere and at any time through the academic year.
- On the flip side, some may be more restrictive with their enrollment time, require class attendance, or have a fixed assignment/test schedule. So be sure to enquire about that if flexibility is a priority for you.
- Do you have a student with a learning difference? Does the academy/school cater to and provide support?
- Be sure to also enquire about the academy/school's transfer policy (i.e. transferring subjects from another high school).
- Obtain clarity about the anumber of subjects you are allowed to take per annum.
- Plenty of academies/schools which offers the Diploma now have South African offices, which – in my personal experience – makes interaction so much easier and timeous for families embarking on this route. The South African administrators also understand the current South African environment and can provide relevant guidance.

Assessment Policy

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

- What assessment methodology do you prefer?
- Some providers advocate continuous assessment with no exams, others apply quizzes, discussion-based assessments, assignments, tests, and exams.
- With online schools, the assessment methodology is mostly fixed and included in the online assessments. A benefit is that it is all automatically graded.
- With umbrella schools, you do have the flexibility to dictate the assessment methodology.

Do I need standardized testing to graduate?

No standardized testing is included in the Diploma itself! Furthermore, the nature of the assessments of your Diploma will depend on your choice of academy/school and/or course material.

That being said, our Matriculation Board and/or the universities (both local and international) might require some sort of standardized testing as part of their exemption/application process. You may encounter:

- 1) In South Africa the [National Benchmark Test \(NBT\)](#). This is SA's version of standardized pre-university testing. The NBT is used by some universities (especially by the more competitive faculties, e.g. medical fields) and is administered by Universities SA.
- 2) In the US the:
 - [Scholastic Assessment Test \(SAT\)](#)³⁴
 - Or the [American College Test \(ACT\)](#)

The US-based colleges/universities use the SAT / ACT for both admission and merit scholarships purposes. These ~3-hour tests measures a student's knowledge and ability in English, Mathematics and Science applications.

Guess these type of tests makes sense: with students entering universities from different educational settings in a global environment, universities need to determine if a student is ready for tertiary studies at their institution.

For the Diploma, our local universities might request the completion of one or both these tests (NBT and SAT/ACT). These should be considered in your high school planning and cost estimate.



³ From June 2021, the optional SAT Essay will no longer form part of the SAT.

⁴ From 2021, the SAT Subject Tests will be phased out.

The American High School Diploma

In South Africa

Is the Diploma the same as the GED?

No, it is not. The GED (General Equivalency Diploma) is a high school equivalency diploma. To be awarded a GED, a student needs to complete a standardized test in the four topics of math, reasoning through language arts, science, and social studies. No Transcript of prior learning is applicable.

USAf does not currently accept the GED for university exemption applications in South Africa, but it is widely accepted in the USA. For more information, refer to [High School Diploma or GED?](#) and various similar online articles.

In Conclusion

For the South African Diploma student, there are various benefits associated with this choice and plenty of avenues available to achieve this. Hope you have a better understanding of the Diploma, and let us know if you have further questions. Look out for upcoming newsletters!

Let's
Connect

Stay in Touch!

Please stay in touch and let us know what further topics you would like to read about:

Annerine Wenhold

Kairos.AcademySA@gmail.com

+27 (0)78 459 1656

This Issue has been sponsored by **Kairos Academy SA**, a trusted service provider supporting South African families.



KAIROS ACADEMY

Excellence in Education

Kairos Academy provides our South African families with:

- A flexible and affordable educational solution (Grades R-12), culminating in a recognized American High School Diploma.
- Support, encouragement, and knowledge sharing during your homeschooling journey.
- Educational consultations and administrative support.
- A South African community of like-minded families, with a collective strive towards excellence.

Upcoming Articles in Issue 02

- **Planning for the high school years**
What does this look like? What are trusted resources which is readily available?
- **Interview with a Diploma family**
Don't miss this interview with a family who is walking the Diploma journey.

Interested in sponsoring the next issue of DiplomaTimesRSA?

Contact Kairos.AcademySA@gmail.com and grow your brand.

Appendix A: South African Matriculation Board's requirements for Diploma students

In summary, to obtain foreign matric exemption for the Diploma, you should:

- 1) Obtain your Diploma through an accredited institution (accredited by an USAf approved accreditation body), together with a letter which certified that you are eligible for admission to any US university; or a
- 2) An accredited Diploma with at least 2 subjects passed on Advanced Placement (AP)-level with a grade of 3-5 (where 5 is the highest); or
- 3) If you are unable to provide the eligibility letter as in option 1, you must provide your Diploma together with SAT results (certain standard thereof required).

Refer to: [USAf's USA Regulations](#)