



Aim Academy Handbook

AimAcademy.Online

**Founded 2011**

**2021-2022 School Year**

**Partners in Your Homeschool Success**

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# Aim Academy Online Handbook

Whether you are a student, parent, or teacher at Aim Academy Online (AAO), we want you to have a great experience. Clear expectations, consistent communications, and a handy reference guide to the policies and practices we've developed over the years is one step in achieving that goal. Thank you for choosing Aim Academy Online. We want to be a part of your family's homeschool success story.

This handbook provides important information regarding AAO policies and procedures. Please read this handbook carefully. We welcome your questions and comments. Please use our contact form:

<https://debrabell.com/contact/>

## Mission Statement

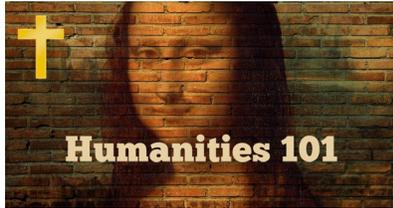
Aim Academy Online is a collaborative partner with parents on their journey to homeschool success. We provide introductory and college prep online classes that combine the flexibility of homeschooling with the best research-based practices for 21st century learning. Our aim is student success as measured by academic achievement and increased interest in each class's subject matter.

### How We Execute Our Mission Statement:

- We create a warm, supportive, and systematic approach to learning that respects developmental differences in children.
- Kids learn best when the subject matter interests them and they feel confident to learn. We share responsibility with parents and students for developing students' interests and self-confidence in learning.
- Our **introductory** elementary and middle school classes focus on making learning fun and developing students' interests in different subjects.
- Our **college prep** middle school and high school classes prepare students to be college ready by the end of high school.
- Our middle school classes accommodate the differences among students at the beginning of adolescence, focus on deepening students' interests, and center on the fundamental skills and knowledge that gradually prepare them for more rigorous, high school studies.
- Our **college prep** high school classes focus on the fundamental knowledge that colleges expect students to master by the end of high school. While we do not want students to be challenged beyond their readiness, challenge is a critical part of deepening students' confidence in their ability to learn. Once students have reached adolescence, rigor is good—especially within the context of a positive and engaging learning experience.
- All classes help students develop the soft skills and independent learning skills necessary to accomplish their goals after graduation. One significant way we do this is to offer minicourses taught by licensed counselor, Bonnie Gonzalez, which teach the soft skills associated with positive mental health, personal success, and overall well-being.
- All classes are open to a range of ages, so students can start at their levels of success.
- We keep our staff updated on the best practices for an online context and provide the technology to support student learning.

## Aim Academy Online Course Content

- Overall, our goal is to provide developmentally appropriate, yet academically challenging course content and assignments that engage students and pique their interest in the subject matter.
- Middle school classes prepare students to succeed in AAO high school classes. The recommended progression of coursework is noted in the course descriptions.
- Our college prep high school classes align with college entrance exams (ACT, SAT) and/or the relevant equivalency exams (AP, CLEP, SAT Subject Test) and position students to score high on these tests by the end of high school if they so choose.
- Even if students do not take these tests, many college placement exams are aligned with these exams, so mastering the content and skills incorporated in our classes is essential for college bound students.
- More information about the content of these exams can be found here:
  - <https://www.act.org/>
  - <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat>
  - <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/home>
  - <https://clep.collegeboard.org/>
- We endorse these exams because they allow students to earn college credit for their high school work in the most economical way. Colleges do not charge students for the credits they earn through equivalence exam testing, whereas families incur a cost if students take a college course or ask the college to award credit based on the student's work through other methods.
- AAO course content is nonsectarian, but sensitive to the concerns of conservative and Christian families.
- If explicit Christian content is incorporated in a course, this is noted in the course description. The symbol of a cross also appears in the image used for the class on our website. For example:



## Student Safety and Privacy

At AAO we take student safety and privacy seriously. Here is how we make sure students are not at risk while attending our live classes and accessing our courses in Canvas.

- Foremost, parents are responsible for supervising their children's online behavior while on our platform and attending the live classes. To help you with this responsibility, the parent observer account in Canvas allows you to monitor your child's activity. We recommend parents check the progress and online activity of their children on a weekly basis.
- We ask parents, students, and teachers to communicate solely within the Canvas messaging system, which creates a record of interactions and does not show the student's private information (such as an email address).
- Our teachers have passed background checks.
- Best practices for protecting student privacy and safety are regularly reviewed with faculty
- Our website is GDPR and COPPA compliant.
- Our website has the highest level of security available from WP Engine, our hosting provider.

- Our LMS (learning management system) is Canvas, an industry leader in K-12 learning platforms. Their privacy statement along with documentation can be found [here](#).
- Zoom is used for live class meetings. Their recent updates to privacy and security can be found [here](#). (During the unfortunate problems at the beginning of the pandemic, we kept our faculty informed of practices to avoid Zoom bombing and other breaches of security.)
- Parents are notified if the class uses applications that require students to leave Canvas or collaborate outside of class with other students. Parents are solely responsible for supervising their children's online behavior while completing these assignments.

Parents are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns about their children's safety and privacy to the AAO administration. Contact us at [admin@aimacademy.online](mailto:admin@aimacademy.online).

### **Aim Academy Online Expectations for Our Online Culture**

- Students show respect for the authority of the teacher and respect for each other, including those with whom they may not agree.
- Students demonstrate respect for themselves and for their parents by adhering to the highest standards of academic integrity in their class participation and course work.
- Teachers create a warm, nurturing, personable, and safe environment for all students.
- Teachers encourage full participation of every student and initiate involvement of the parent when a student is struggling or disengaged.

### **Accommodating Special Needs and Special Circumstances**

- At AAO, we understand that students have individual differences. We strive to create learning environments that allow all students to succeed.
- **Parents are responsible to make teachers aware of a student's special needs or circumstances before registering for the class.**
- Teachers are free to accommodate students with special needs and to be flexible in modifying assignments upon request.
- Parents are requested to be respectful of the teacher's time limitations when requesting accommodations.
- If accommodating student or parent requests requires additional time from the teacher, appropriate compensation for the teacher should be arranged and handled through AAO administration.

### **Class Size**

- AAO class limit is 21. *Most have a limit of less than 21.* This is noted on course descriptions.
- Teachers are free to set class size limits below AAO class limit of 21.
- Parents will be notified if the class limit of 21 will be exceeded.
- Teachers are free to accept or decline students according to the criteria set out in their course descriptions.

### **Course Individuality**

Teachers may develop and alter the structure of their courses to better meet the needs of the students and the course. This includes but is not limited to the grading scale, the timing of assignments and grading, live class participation, late assignments, and disciplinary action. During the first week of class, teachers will post information detailing any deviation from the standards and regulations in this handbook.

## Student Responsibilities

Our aim is to create a warm, engaging, and nurturing environment for all students. We can't do this alone.

Students contribute to the positive climate at AAO in the following ways:

- Come to class prepared.
- Participate in class discussions.
- Take an interest in other classmates and affirm their contributions.
- Let teachers know when you enjoy an assignment or a class experience. In the same way positive feedback encourages you, it encourages your teachers. (Remember, teachers are people too.)
- Commit to the success of the class to make the class a positive experience for everyone.

### Communications

Students are responsible for communicating promptly and regularly with teachers when they have questions, lack clarity about the requirements for assignments, struggle, need help, or have any concerns or observations that will contribute to their success or make the overall climate of the class more successful for all. Taking the initiative to communicate clearly and positively with a teacher (or any authority figure) is a life skill critical to students' future success.

Our AAO teachers are quite talented and knowledgeable, but they still can't read minds. Speak up! Communicate. It will make most situations better.

Once class has started, we ask students to use only the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) email system to contact teachers. This provides a permanent record of interactions between students and teachers and is very helpful for parents and administrators when addressing problems and misunderstandings.

### Academic Honesty

At AAO, we strive to help students grow as independent learners and to take responsibility for their academic progress. Students and parents are expected to complete the AAO orientation material before starting their first class at Aim. This orientation covers principles of academic integrity and plagiarism.

In addition, during the first week of class, teachers will review principles of academic integrity and make sure students know how to avoid plagiarism.

Excellent resources can be found at [plagiarism.org](http://plagiarism.org). Please review the information found there.

AAO students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in their work. The AAO definition of academic honesty follows:

**Academic honesty is telling the truth about what you know, acknowledging those who contribute to your work, and citing sources properly so readers know you are trustworthy.**

In AAO classes, this means that students submit their own work, write their own papers, properly cite their resources, and follow the standards set by the teachers. (See [Parental Assistance](#) for our recommendation on helping students.)

During the first week of classes (after teachers review the definition of plagiarism and how to avoid it), middle school and high school students will be asked to sign the following honor code:

*Because I want to be a person who maintains the highest standards of integrity and honorable character, and I want to be a member of the Aim Academy Online community, I make a personal commitment to uphold the following standards:*

- *Strive for excellence as a student.*
- *Cooperate respectfully with those who are helping me.*
- *Care for and respect my classmates.*
- *Be truthful, trustworthy, and appropriate in my words and actions.*
- *Refrain from any form of cheating, including inappropriate parental involvement.*

*By signing this document, I give my word of honor that I will respect the Aim Academy Online Student Honor Code. I will do all in my power to uphold AAO's high standards.*

## **Plagiarism Policy**

Aim Academy Online prohibits all forms of plagiarism. Plagiarism is the act of presenting the ideas and statements of another as if they are one's own without crediting the original source. When students use someone else's words or ideas, they must credit the source by following the guidelines provided by the teacher at the beginning of the course.

At AAO, we take responsibility for making sure students understand what constitutes plagiarism and teaching them how to properly credit their sources and avoid unintentional plagiarism.

If a teacher suspects that a student may have plagiarized (intentionally or unintentionally), the teacher will contact the parent in the **first instance** to solicit the parent's involvement and preferences for handling the situation. All incidents of this nature must be reported to the AAO administration and documented.

Ongoing failure to comply with AAO's plagiarism policy will result in disciplinary action that may include any of the following:

- A conference with student, parent, and teacher.
- Requiring the student to redo the assignment.
- A failing grade for the assignment.
- Other consequences determined by the teacher, including dismissal from the course.

Disciplinary action will depend on the severity of the plagiarism. In administering any disciplinary actions, our posture will be gracious and restorative—even while upholding a high standard for academic integrity.

## **Cheating Policy**

We expect middle school and high school students to understand what constitutes cheating prior to their enrollment in AAO classes. Teachers review types of cheating during the first week of class prior to asking students to sign the honor code.

Parents will be engaged immediately if a student is suspected of cheating. Flagrant cheating will result in a failing grade for the assignment and may also include dismissal from the course at AAO's discretion.

(See [Parent Assistance](#) for our recommendation on helping your children with assignments.)

## Attendance Policy

- Students are strongly encouraged to attend live classes. Students who cannot regularly attend live classes should make the teacher aware of this prior to registering.
- There is no penalty for not attending the live classes if students view the recording.
- Students who miss class are expected to view the recording of the live class within a week of its posting on the class website. (Canvas's analytics enables teachers to confirm that a student has watched the full recording.)
- Students are expected to complete all class assignments by the due date.

## Late Work Policy

- Teachers will post assignments at least 7 days prior to their due date.
- Students must complete all assignments by the due date, unless prior arrangements have been made with the teacher.
- Teachers may set their own late work policies. This will be in writing and reviewed with students at the beginning of the course.
- Students are responsible to communicate with the teacher if an assignment is going to be late.

## Working Ahead

- Teachers are not required to provide students with access to assignments more than 7 days prior to their due date. (Caveat: Our teachers understand that students need access to assignments that require a significant time commitment by a much earlier date.)
- Teachers are not required to accommodate requests for students to work ahead in a course. This usually requires extra time from our teachers. Teachers are free to accommodate these types of requests if they are able.

## Inactive Students

- Students who are inactive on Canvas for two consecutive weeks without excuse will be made inactive in the class. The parent or guardian on file will be contacted by AAO administration.
- If no response is received within five business days, the student will be dropped from the class.
- If the student continues to be inactive, even with assistance from the parent or guardian, the student will be dropped from the class following the next consecutive seven days of inactivity registered in the log on Canvas.
- There is a \$50 fee to reactivate a student who has been dropped from a class.

## Student Academic Responsibility

Students' responsibilities include the following:

- Inform themselves of and abide by all AAO standards as listed in this handbook.
- Submit all course work by the due dates posted by the teacher.
- Attend live classes or listen to the recording in a timely manner.
- Put forth a conscientious effort in all school assignments and live classes.
- Use respectful online behavior.
- Maintain good communication with teachers, which includes asking for help when needed.

- Use the Canvas communication system exclusively once class is in session.

## Parent Responsibilities

Parents, we ask that you fulfill the following responsibilities to support your child(ren)'s success and ensure clear, consistent communication with AAO faculty and administration:

- Inform yourself of the rules set forth in this handbook and review this handbook with your child(ren).
- Create a Parent Observer Account in Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) and use it to regularly monitor student work. **You will be invited to do so via email in mid-August.**
- Communicate with faculty via Canvas communication system exclusively throughout the school year.
- Maintain computer and equipment such that student can complete all required work.
- Monitor to ensure that student completes required assignments and attends live classes.
- Provide appropriate assistance to your child(ren) when needed.
- Avoid assistance that violates the academic integrity policies for middle school and high school students. (Check with teachers for clarification if you are not sure.)
- Provide an appropriate work environment, including a quiet location in which to attend live classes.
- Support your child(ren)'s learning when needed, which may include reviewing and reinforcing instruction.
- As a professional courtesy, communicate first with the teacher(s) regarding any questions, concerns, or disagreements promptly. If questions, concerns, or disagreements are not resolved to your satisfaction, please do not hesitate to contact AAO administration.

## Methods of Communication

Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) is the primary communication tool for AAO. We encourage parents, students, and teachers to use all its features to stay up to date with lessons, assignments, calendar, emails, and announcements.

Once class has begun, please contact teachers exclusively through Canvas so all parties have a record of communication. (In other words, please do not contact teachers through their private email addresses.)

Please help your child learn how to properly communicate with an instructor via Canvas. Students should clearly state the reason for their messages in the subject line. Emails should be polite, clear, and complete. We understand emails can easily include grammatical and spelling errors—that's okay—emails are not graded! It is more important that students use appropriate language when addressing adults. Students should address teachers with the titles they request; for example, Mrs., Ms., Dr. (Use emojis, acronyms, and emoticons with caution. They do not always fit the tone of the message.)

## Parental Assistance

Parents are encouraged to support students in their journey to independent learning. You know your child best, and you know how much assistance your child needs to be successful in a learning environment. At AAO, we will come alongside you in that journey. Research shows students achieve full independence and responsibility for their learning when they have been supported and mentored by parents and teachers along the way (like a good coach). The road to independent learning is a gradual process for most students.

Contact the teacher if you have any questions or concerns about assisting your children. Here is a guiding principle:

**In any Aim Academy Online course, parents are free to support students in any way a teacher might provide support.**

Examples of appropriate assistance include the following:

- Clarifying the assignment.
- Brainstorming possible topics, responses, or projects before the student begins the assignment.
- Providing a critical review of a student's work prior to submission, along with recommendations for improvement.
- Reviewing material together prior to a quiz or test.
- Checking the work for grammatical or spelling errors prior to submission.

Aim Academy Online guidelines for acceptable parental collaboration (also applies to assistance from siblings and peers) are as follows:

- Parents are free to fully assist elementary and middle school students in completing assignments and assessments. Because these courses do not appear on AAO transcripts, we believe parents are best situated to determine how much assistance is appropriate.
- Parents should not contribute to a student's submitted work in a credit-bearing high school course without first discussing the circumstances with the teacher (and possibly AAO administration).

Examples of inappropriate assistance for a high school student include the following:

- Supplying answers to a graded quiz or test.
- Rewriting or revising a student's written work. (Copy editing is acceptable.)
- Contributing to the graded work on an assignment, essay, or project.

Please do not hesitate to contact the teacher if you are unsure whether your assistance undermines a student's academic integrity or not. When a parent and student collaborate on a project, the simplest way to be above reproach is to acknowledge the degree of parental assistance when submitting the assignment. This information also helps teachers understand better where the student is in his or her progress toward independence and proficiency.

## Administrative Policies and Procedures

### Grading Scale

AAO's grading scale is as follows:

- 90 - 100 A
- 80 - 89 B
- 70 - 79 C
- 60 - 69 D
- Below 60 Failing

Teachers may choose to base grades on submitted work alone, or on some combination of submitted work, class participation, and other factors. **Teachers may choose to use a different grading scale if they deem it to be appropriate in their classes.** In the first week of classes, teachers will post information which describe their grading policies.

## Grade Reports

Student grades are visible to students and parents (through parent Observer accounts). Grade reports can be downloaded from Canvas at any time in the form of a PDF file. Once the course is closed, access to the gradebook is no longer possible. Teachers will notify parents before closing a course so parents can download grade reports for their permanent records.

## Grievance Procedures/Appeals

If a student or parent wishes to make a formal complaint, the following procedure should be followed:

- First, contact the teacher and try to resolve the grievance informally.
- If this doesn't work, please submit a written grievance report to Debra Bell. This may be submitted via email to [dbell@aimacademy.online](mailto:dbell@aimacademy.online). The written report should contain the following:
  - A description of the grievance.
  - A summary of steps that have been taken to resolve the problem.
  - The names of the person(s) thought to be responsible for the problem.
  - Other facts pertinent to the grievance.

You will receive a response to your grievance within 48 business hours, either from Debra Bell or her representative.

## Refund Policy

Registration (technology) fees are nonrefundable.

**For classes paid in full before the start of the course,** the following refund policies apply:

- Please request a refund by e-mail via our [contact](#) page.
- We issue an 80% refund if you withdraw from the course prior to the third Monday of August. (This gives us time to add wait-listed students to classes that are closed.)
- We issue an 60% refund if you withdraw from the course prior to Week 7. (First week of October)
- No refunds are issued after Oct. 1, 2021.

**For mini-courses and one semester courses:** 80% refund if you withdraw prior to first week of the course. 60% if you withdraw prior to 3rd week of the course. No refunds issued after 1st Monday of Week 3.

For students on a payment plan, the following refund policies apply:

- Please request a refund by e-mail via our website.
- We will issue a refund, less 20% of the full scheduled payment if you withdraw prior to the start of the class. (For example, if full payment would have been \$600, we return what you have paid, less \$120).
- We will issue a refund, less 40% of full scheduled payment, if you withdraw prior to Week 7. (no refunds after October 1, 2021)

- The same policies apply to mini-courses and semester courses if you withdraw prior to the 3rd week of the course. No refunds after the 1st Sunday of Week 3.

**Credit Option:** You may elect to receive 75% credit for the amount paid, excluding technology fee, toward a future AAO course. The credit option is only available up to the deadlines for 60% refund (prior to week 7 of full year course; prior to week 3 of semester/minicourses.)

## Technical Requirements

High speed, broadband Internet, sound card, webcam, and a microphone are necessary to participate in the live class sessions. Streaming video capabilities are necessary to watch recorded lectures. A quality headset is also recommended for live lectures (one with a USB connection is best). A scanner is recommended for most high school level classes as well as the ability to convert documents to a PDF format.

Assignments may be uploaded to Canvas in the following formats:

- PDF
- Microsoft Office applications (e.g., .doc, .docx, .ppt, .xlsx)
- Open Office applications
- Rich text (e.g. .rtf)

Students using a Mac must convert Notes or Pages to another accepted format. Not all formats are accepted in all classes. Teachers will note what formats are acceptable for class work in their course syllabi.

## Transcripts

Parents may request one unofficial transcript per year free of charge for their records. Please request a transcript through the contact form on our website. If a student drops or withdraws from a course, that course does not appear on the transcript.

Official transcripts emailed to college admissions' offices are \$25/per request (We will email to an unlimited number of colleges per request). Official transcripts snail mailed are \$30/per mailed transcript.

Transcripts require 5 business days. Rushed requests, if possible, are \$50. We cannot guarantee fulfillment of a rushed request, especially over a weekend.

## 2021-22 AAO Calendar

### School Calendar 2021 – 2022

- Start of the school year: August 23, 2021
- Thanksgiving Holiday: Week of November 22
- Winter Break: December 20 – January 2
- Second Semester: Week of January 3
- 2022 - 23 Returning Families Registration Opens: Feb 22, 2022
- 2022 - 23 Registration Opens for All: Mar 1, 2022

- Spring Break: March 7– March 11, 2022
- Last week of class: Last week of April or second week of May. See short course descriptions for details.

### **Mini - course Schedule 2021 – 22**

Winter: Jan 4 – Feb 19

Spring: March 29th – May 14th

Summer 1: May 17th – July 2nd

Summer 2: July 5th – August 20th

Fall 1: August 23rd - October 8th

Fall 2: Oct 11– Dec 3

Winter 2022: Jan 3 – Feb 18

Additional policies are published on the website [here](#).