

THE PROMONTORY ACADEMY

Knoxville Homeschool Pod

In-person learning for homeschooled students ages 10 to 14.



Monday-Thursday · Four hours a day · Starting January 2027

A GUIDE FOR KNOXVILLE POD FAMILIES

A homeschool pod in Knoxville

Your child remains homeschooled. Four days a week, they learn in person with a small group and an experienced teacher.

The Knoxville Homeschool Pod meets Monday through Thursday for four hours a day. We expect the daily schedule to fall in the morning / mid-day window; exact start and end times will be set once the facility schedule is final. The founding term begins in January 2027 and runs through May.

We bring the academic core with us. Families do not have to assemble separate math, science, history, reading and writing programs and then try to make them fit together. TPA is written as an integrated program, so the major subjects connect around a shared question or problem.

TPA uses Lower Division materials for younger students and Upper Division materials for older students in the ages 10-14 cohort. Students work in the division that best fits their readiness, then use five challenge levels to determine how far they push each task.

The work asks a lot. This is not a remedial or drop-in program. Students join a cohort, work consistently, write, discuss, revise, and learn to take increasing ownership of their work.

TPA is secular and inclusive. Families of every faith and background are welcome.

AT A GLANCE

DAYS
Monday to Thursday

HOURS
Four hours a day

TIME
Morning / mid-day (exact hours TBD)

TERM
January to May 2027

AGES
10 to 14

CURRICULUM
Complete academic core included

ASSESSMENT
Renaissance Star Reading and Star Math

LOCATION
Cedar Bluff / Farragut area

WHAT IS A LEARNING POD?

Tennessee's Learning Pod Protection Act protects voluntary learning pods and makes clear that the pod itself is not a private school, church-related school, or home school. For the Knoxville pod, each participating student remains registered as an independent homeschool student with the family's local school district, and the parent or legal guardian remains the teacher of record. See page 8 for the exact filing, attendance and testing steps.

Sources: Tennessee Learning Pod Protection Act; Tennessee Department of Education, Home School.

One question, every subject

Math, science and history approach one big question from different, complementary angles. Reading, research and writing run through all of them.

FOUR SUBJECTS. ONE PROBLEM.
How can one person measure the whole Earth with a stick?

1 MATH



The shadow's angle is one fiftieth of a circle.

ALEXANDRIA



SYENE



2 SCIENCE



Why two sticks cast different shadows at the same moment.

5,000 STADES APART

3 HISTORY



Who Eratosthenes was and where he worked.

157.5 m

READING AND WRITING, EVERY DAY

The sources disagree on how long a stade was. Which one do you trust?

185 m

The free trial week you downloaded shows this structure in full. Its central question is how Eratosthenes estimated the size of Earth using a stick, a shadow, geometry, and observations made in two places.

In math, students work with angles and fractions of a circle. In science, they investigate why the same Sun casts different shadows at different locations. In history, they meet Eratosthenes and the intellectual world of Alexandria. In reading and writing, they compare conflicting source information and decide which evidence is more trustworthy.

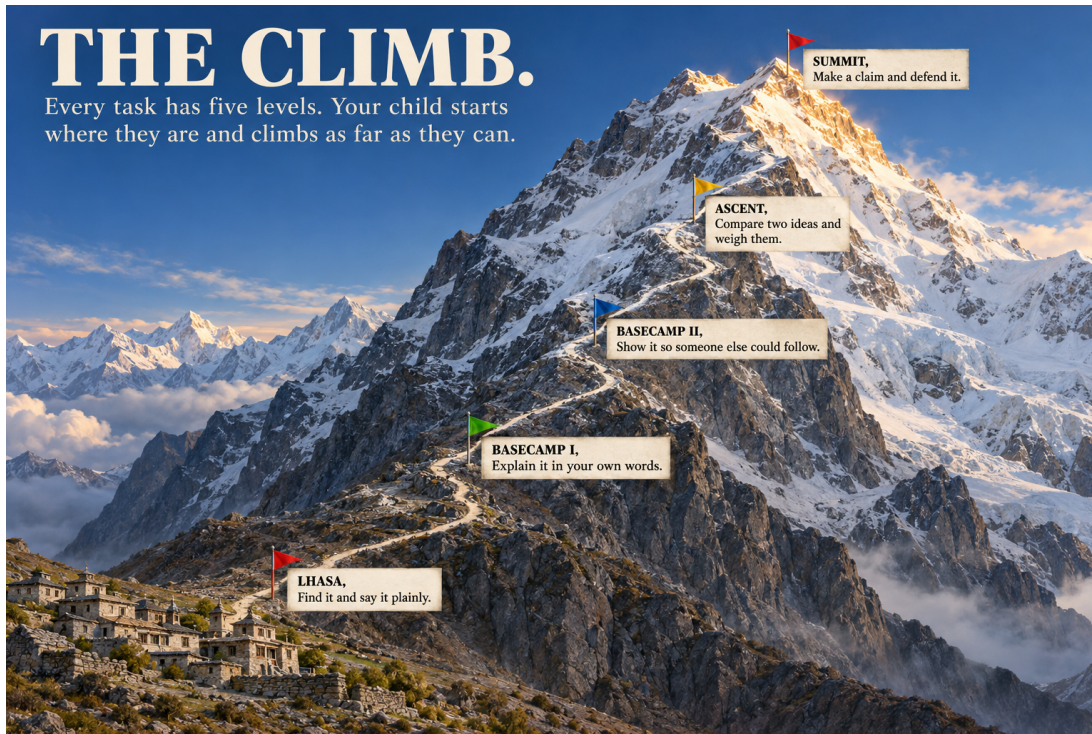
Ideas return later. A skill or concept introduced in one arc reappears in later work, so students must retrieve it, use it again, and connect it to new situations.

WHY THIS MATTERS

TPA is designed so that subjects reinforce one another rather than competing for separate blocks of attention. Students repeatedly use knowledge in context instead of treating each subject as an isolated worksheet.

Challenge without fixed ability tracks

Lower and Upper Division provide different developmental entry points. Within each division, every task offers five levels of depth.



The five levels are Lhasa, Basecamp I, Basecamp II, Ascent and Summit. The lower levels ask students to identify, explain and show their reasoning. Higher levels ask them to compare, connect, evaluate, model, or defend a claim with evidence.

A student does not have to reach Summit on every task. Careful work at the first three levels is real achievement; rushing to a harder level without understanding is not. A student may go farther in math one week and farther in history the next.

Math sections include worked solutions so students can check their process, find an error, and try again. The goal is not to hide answers; it is to build accurate, increasingly independent thinking.

The important distinction: Lower and Upper Division are not “easy” and “hard” groups. They are age/readiness versions of the same integrated program, and challenge levels operate inside each version.

Children who help each other

The Sherpa Ethos turns peer support into part of the learning culture: finish your own thinking, then help someone else move forward without giving away the answer.

THE SHERPA ETHOS

Students move farther when they help one another.

The Sherpa Ethos is the working culture of our room. It means that when you understand a task, you don't sit and wait for the next one. You look around, find someone who is still working, and help them move forward. You explain, ask questions, point to the right part, and help them think it through. You do not give the answer. The goal is for every student to finish by climbing together.

- 1 You Finish**
You work on the task until you understand it. When you can do it on your own, you stand up. That means you are ready to help.
- 2 You Help**
You find a classmate who is still working. You ask where they are stuck, listen to their thinking, and help them take the next step. You explain, give hints, and point them to useful ideas. You do not give the answer.
- 3 Everyone Climbs**
As more students finish, more help spreads across the room. The students you helped then help someone else. This continues until everyone is standing, which means everyone has made progress and can move on with confidence.

A stronger climb for everyone.

Stronger students. A kinder room. A higher standard.

Guiding someone without telling them the answer is difficult. A student has to understand the work well enough to ask a useful question, offer a hint, or explain a process in another way. The helper strengthens their own understanding while the other student gets unstuck.

The teacher remains responsible for instruction, feedback and misconceptions. Peer help is structured support, not a substitute for teaching.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

The Education Endowment Foundation's current evidence review reports a positive average impact for collaborative learning and stresses that it works best when tasks are carefully designed, participation is structured, and students are accountable for thinking and explaining. Those conditions are built into the Sherpa Ethos.

The rest of the week

A TPA week has several regular parts that students learn to recognize and manage for themselves.

Writing by hand

Students keep a notebook and write substantial portions of their work by hand. Screens are used for research and selected tools; much of the thinking and explanation goes on paper.

Oxygen Math

Each week includes a focused math section that teaches or reviews the skills needed for the larger problem, shows worked examples, provides practice, and then sends students back into application.

Plant Your Flag

Near the end of the week, students read a set of sources, take a position on the week's question, and write a short evidence-based argument.

The Roundtable

Students discuss the week's question around one table, bring evidence, question one another, and revise their thinking. TPA draws on the Harkness discussion tradition developed at Phillips Exeter in the early 1930s.

Defense of Learning

Every six weeks, students select work that shows growth and explain what they learned, what changed in their thinking, and what they can now do independently.

Renaissance Star

Star Reading and Star Math are used at the beginning and end of the term as program progress measures. They do not replace any testing required by a family's legal homeschool arrangement.

FRIDAY SUPPORT

Friday support and office hours are scheduled separately as needed. These may include online discussion, review, questions, or individual help.

Led by an experienced teacher

Robert Heckerl, M.Ed., founded The Promontory Academy and designed its curriculum.

33

YEARS IN EDUCATION

5

COUNTRIES TAUGHT IN

M.Ed.

GRADUATE DEGREE IN EDUCATION

Robert has worked in education for 33 years and has taught in the United States, South Korea, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Georgia and Myanmar - across four continents. A demanding curriculum needs a teacher who knows when to explain, when to question, when to push, and when to let a student wrestle productively with a problem.

YOUR ROLE

You remain the homeschool parent of record

TPA provides instruction through the learning pod, but your family remains the independent home school. The parent or legal guardian is the teacher of record and handles the state-required Notice of Intent, attendance record, grade 5/7/9 testing and school records. Page 8 walks through each step.

WE PROVIDE

- Complete academic core across math, science, history/social studies, reading, writing, research and design
- Four hours of in-person instruction Monday-Thursday
- Feedback on student work
- Renaissance Star Reading and Star Math
- Roundtable discussion and Defense of Learning
- A small cohort of other homeschool students
- Friday support / office hours as scheduled

YOU HANDLE

- Notice of Intent with your local school district
- Your full 180-day homeschool attendance record
- Required standardized testing in grades 5, 7 and 9
- Grades and the student's transcript
- Learning and family routines outside pod hours
- Final educational decisions about your child

What Knoxville pod parents need to do

TPA provides the instruction. You remain the independent homeschool parent of record.

HOW THE POD AND HOMESCHOOL STATUS FIT TOGETHER

TPA Knoxville operates as a learning pod under Tennessee's Learning Pod Protection Act. The pod itself is not a private school, church-related school, or home school. Each participating family separately operates an independent home school; the parent or legal guardian remains the teacher of record.

1 File the Notice of Intent

Submit Tennessee's Notice of Intent to Home School to the public school district where you live. A family may begin independent homeschooling during the school year. To continue, file a new notice before each school year. The parent-teacher must hold a high school diploma or state-approved equivalency credential.

2 Keep the attendance record

Maintain at least 180 instructional days per school year, with at least four hours of instruction per day. Submit the attendance record to your local director of schools at the end of the school year. TPA supplies four hours of instruction on each in-person pod day; you maintain the complete annual homeschool calendar.

3 Arrange required testing

Students in grades 5, 7 and 9 must complete required standardized testing. Current law permits either a parent-selected nationally normed test in English language arts and mathematics that meets the statutory proctor/recording rules, or the state-approved assessment. TPA's Star tests are program progress measures; families remain responsible for the statutory grade-level test.

4 Keep grades and school records

The parent-teacher maintains grades and the student's transcript. TPA provides curriculum, feedback, work samples and Star results that families may use as part of their records. The parent remains responsible for the child's official homeschool record.

IF YOU ARE JOINING THE POD IN JANUARY

If your child attended another school earlier in the same school year, file the Notice of Intent when you withdraw and ask your district's home school coordinator how the earlier attendance should be reflected in your annual record.

OFFICIAL FORMS AND HELP

Tennessee Department of Education -> Home School -> Independent Home School. Look for: Notice of Intent to Home School, Independent Home School Requirements, and District Home School Coordinators.

TPA questions: info@thepromontoryacademy.com

Sources: Tennessee Learning Pod Protection Act; Tenn. Code Ann. 49-6-3050; Tennessee Department of Education Home School guidance; Public Chapter 912 (2026).

Why we teach this way

These studies and evidence reviews support specific instructional choices. They are not presented as an independent evaluation of TPA as a whole.

Skills come back later

Dunlosky and colleagues reviewed ten common learning techniques and rated practice testing and distributed practice as high-utility approaches across a wide range of learners and tasks. TPA deliberately brings important ideas back after time has passed.

Dunlosky et al. (2013), Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 14(1), 4-58.

Explain it in your own words

In a 1994 study of eighth-graders learning about the circulatory system, students prompted to self-explain showed greater gains in understanding than a rereading control group. TPA repeatedly asks students to explain reasoning, not just give answers.

Chi, de Leeuw, Chiu & Lavancher (1994), Cognitive Science, 18(3), 439-477.

Worked examples, then practice

Research on worked examples supports showing learners expert solution processes before expecting fully independent problem solving, especially when a skill is new. Oxygen Math uses worked examples before independent practice and application.

Atkinson, Derry, Renkl & Wortham (2000), Review of Educational Research, 70(2), 181-214.

Answers and feedback

Hattie and Timperley's review describes feedback as a major influence on learning, while emphasizing that its effect depends on the kind of feedback and how it is used. TPA uses worked solutions, teacher feedback and revision rather than treating answers as hidden prizes.

Hattie & Timperley (2007), Review of Educational Research, 77(1), 81-112.

The Sherpa Ethos

The Education Endowment Foundation reports a positive average effect for collaborative learning and stresses that productive collaboration must be structured, with carefully designed tasks and meaningful participation.

Education Endowment Foundation, Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Collaborative Learning Approaches (current evidence review).

The Roundtable

An EEF trial of dialogic teaching across 76 English primary schools reported about two months of additional progress in English and science and a smaller impact in mathematics. TPA's Roundtable similarly centers reasoning, questioning and evidence-rich discussion.

EEF, Dialogic Teaching evaluation (2017).

Writing by hand

A 2024 high-density EEG study of 36 university students found more elaborate brain-connectivity patterns during handwriting than during single-finger keyboard typing. The result concerns neural connectivity; it does not by itself establish higher test scores.

Van der Weel & Van der Meer (2024), Frontiers in Psychology, 14:1219945.

Star progress measures

Renaissance publishes Tennessee-specific linking work connecting Star Reading and Star Math scaled scores with TCAP performance. TPA uses Star to monitor progress during the program, not as a substitute for any legally required state testing.

Renaissance, Pathway to Proficiency: Linking Star Reading and Star Math to the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).

Short answers

Is this a school?

No. TPA Knoxville is a learning pod under Tennessee law. The pod itself is not a private school, church-related school, or home school. Each participating child remains an independent homeschool student, with the parent or legal guardian as teacher of record. See page 8 for the filing and recordkeeping steps.

Is it religious?

No. TPA is secular and inclusive. Families of every faith and background are welcome.

What ages is it for?

Ages 10-14. Lower Division materials serve younger students; Upper Division materials serve older students. Readiness determines placement more than a birthday cutoff.

When does it meet?

Monday through Thursday, four hours a day, January through May 2027. We expect morning / mid-day hours, with exact times set when the facility schedule is final. Friday support and office hours are scheduled separately as needed.

Is my child ready?

TPA is not a remedial program. Students should be ready for sustained reading, writing, discussion and problem solving. Five challenge levels allow students to work at different depths without turning the room into fixed ability groups.

Can my child join partway through?

The founding cohort begins together in January. Later entry may be possible only if space, timing and academic fit allow.

Do I need to buy the curriculum?

No. The complete TPA academic core used in the pod is included in tuition.

Where is it?

We are securing space in the Cedar Bluff / Farragut area. The exact location will be announced when the facility agreement is final.

What does it cost?

Tuition is \$600 per month. A \$200 nonrefundable enrollment reservation is credited toward tuition. Only 10 places, first-come, first-served, after families review the free trial and confirm academic fit.

What do I have to file?

Submit Tennessee's Notice of Intent to Home School to the public school district where you live, then maintain the attendance, testing, grade and transcript records described on page 8.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

1. Explore the free trial week. Look closely at the actual student work and the level of thinking expected.
2. Keep this Parent Guide. It explains the Knoxville model, expectations and structure.
3. Watch for parent information-session dates. Before reserving a seat, review the free trial and confirm TPA is the right academic fit for your child.

Questions: info@thepromontoryacademy.com