OVERVIEW  Founded in 2009, Abaarso School is a non-profit boarding school for boys and girls, grades 7-12, in Somaliland. Abaarso holds its students to extremely high standards of academics and character, reflecting the school's values of Integrity, Tenacity, and Critical Thinking.

Graduates of the school learn that the privilege that an Abaarso education provides leads to the expectation that they will return home to become leaders in their country, and on the world stage.

Our student body is comprised of 250 students with an equal number of boys and girls. 95% of our students are from Somaliland and 5% are Somaliland diaspora.

BEFORE ABAARSO, IT HAD BEEN DECADES SINCE STUDENTS FROM SOMALILAND HAD EARNED SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES.

MISSION AND VISION  We believe in nurturing the academic, intellectual, and character development of promising Somali boys and girls, so they can effectively and ethically advance their society as the leader of tomorrow. We strive to develop great people, not simply great students.

ACCREDITATION  Abaarso is accredited by the New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC).

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND MEDIA  Abaarso School is a HALI member organization. The story of Abaarso has also been the subject of a book, It Takes a School, and a documentary, Somaliland. Abaarso School has been featured on 60 Minutes, Morning Joe, and in The New York Times, CNN Money, BBC, Voice of America, The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg Business Week, Forbes, The Boston Globe, and many other publications.

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SCHOOL PROFILE 2023-2024
**SCHOOL CULTURE** Abaarso’s focus on ethical development (“Integrity”), determination (“Tenacity”), and rigorous independent thought (“Critical Thinking”) equips students with the characteristics they will need to succeed in international environments, and ultimately, as exemplary leaders of the Somali people. All programs at Abaarso are designed with these three pillars in mind.

Students are engaged in extracurriculars outside of the classroom that aim to foster these characteristics. Sports and clubs are an integral part of Abaarso’s whole-child education philosophy. These also extend the English immersion environment beyond the classroom and into places where students play and interact with one another in their free time.

Community service is at the heart of Abaarso’s culture and our students are constantly searching for opportunities to contribute to their communities. Abaarso students recognize that their community does not only include those living in their dorms and on campus, but also in the local village, their hometowns, and their society as a whole.

**ADMISSIONS** Abaarso’s admissions process is need-blind. Each year, the Abaarso admissions test is administered to around 2,300 applicants in nine cities and towns around Somaliland. The admissions test assesses logic and math. For the Fall 2023 intake, 38 students were admitted of over 2,200 applicants (<2% admissions rate).

**FINANCIAL AID** Full tuition for a local student is $2,100 per year including room and board. The cost of attendance is $3,000 so every Abaarso student is on some level of scholarship. 70% of students are also on need-based financial aid. We believe that all students deserve a world-class education and a family’s financial circumstances should not be an obstacle.

**We believe that all students deserve a world-class education. 70% of our students are on need-based financial aid.**
Grading: Grades at Abaarso are low. Across the school, the target grade range is 78-84%. GPA is calculated by taking the average of a student’s class grades, weighted according to the credit hours of each class, which correspond to the number of hours each week that a class meets.

The school-wide for 2022-2023 average GPA for grades 9-12 is approximately 3.10 out of a possible 4.33. GPAs above 3.50 are considered excellent and above 4.00 is very rare. Abaarso students with average GPAs have gone on to excel at US colleges and boarding schools.

Anyone looking at an Abaarso transcript should keep in mind that even Abaarso students with average or below average grades are still among the top 1% of all students in Somaliland in terms of educational level.

Academics: New students at Abaarso are among the top performers in the country, but enter the school at unsatisfactory levels on an absolute basis. We estimate that new 7th graders enter Abaarso averaging approximately a US 1st grade reading level and 3rd grade math level, though even this knowledge is rote. The school must therefore close a large learning gap in all subjects, in a short time. The language of instruction at every grade level is English.

Students at Abaarso are in class six days each week, for approximately 28 hours total. The sixth day is a school-wide community impact project day where students hone their leadership skills through creative problem solving and collaboration in grade-level or advising groups.

The curriculum is based on an American system with a focus on intensive mathematics, science, English, and logical and creative thinking. Our school is English immersion and the first two years at Abaarso are tailored to bring new students up to the high school level in all subject areas by filling in large holes in their primary school education. Once the work ethic and fundamentals are in place, the upper school years focus on more advanced studies.

In a short time, the school must close large learning gaps in all subjects.
FACULTY  Abaarso faculty have diverse cultural and educational backgrounds but what unites all is a strong belief in student-centered classrooms, a desire to engage with students in and out of the classroom, and a desire to share their passion for learning. The ratio of students to full-time faculty is 10:1.

An indicator of Abaarso’s success is that \( \frac{1}{3} \) of the school’s current teachers are Abaarso alumni who have gone on to complete undergraduate degrees in the US and other world-class universities around the globe and have returned to Abaarso to share their knowledge with the next generation.

New teachers undergo training in classroom management and instructional techniques, participate in professional development throughout the semester, and participate in peer reviews and class observations regularly throughout the year.

NOTABLE ALUMNI PROFILES Abaarso alumni have gone on to excel at boarding schools and universities abroad as well as make significant contributions to both Somaliland and the global community. Refer to our alumni profile supplement for additional inspiring stories.

Mubarak was a nomad from the Ethiopian countryside who arrived at Abaarso in 9th grade before learning English or touching a computer. Four years later he had a full-ride to MIT where he earned a Bachelor’s in Electrical Engineering and subsequently a Master’s degree. He is now programming autonomous vehicles for GPR in Cambridge, MA.

Deqa grew up in Hargeisa, Somaliland before matriculating from Abaarso School to Grinnell College in Iowa. She studied psychology and political science and served as president of the International Student Organization. After working at the World Bank, Deqa was honored as an Obama Scholar while pursuing her Master’s in Public Policy from the University of Chicago.

Fadumo staged a hunger strike to convince her family to let her attend Abaarso before becoming one of the first students in her country in decades to matriculate to a US university. She then returned to Somaliland to help us found the only women’s university in the country and now works in public health.