



ABAARSO SCHOOL

OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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Dear Admission Officers,

We thank you for taking a few extra minutes to review these details of the unique circumstances our applicants find themselves in this year. They describe Abaarso School's response to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, give an overview of our brand new **competencies-based** curriculum, and highlight what's **different on our transcript**.

Abaarso and the Pandemic

On March 17th, only a few days into Abaarso's third term, the Government of Somaliland *closed all public and private schools* in the country for four weeks. Abaarso, a boarding school of ~270 students, had 24 hours to move everyone off campus with as many academic resources as possible. As four weeks turned into eight and the holiday month of Ramadan arrived, we decided to use the continued closure to revamp many aspects of our curriculum and pastoral care system. By the time we reopened to students (in late August for a September start), the life of an Abaarso upper school student was significantly different than what they'd left several months earlier.

Meanwhile, for the rest of the academic year, students engaged with *AbaarsoASAP*, a combined YouTube and Google Classroom program that allowed for student questions and feedback to be shared online or via Whatsapp.. All students had access to the internet at least once a week, though many had to visit friends or neighbors to ensure this. In many cases, a single smartphone was shared among several brothers and sisters.

Although Somaliland lifted its coronavirus lockdown in June 2020, *Abaarso chose to remain closed for the remaining three weeks of our academic year*. Students therefore missed seven months of residential instruction. And education was not the only institution within the country that suffered during this time. Many of our students' *parents lost their jobs or significant income* from businesses that could no longer operate, especially with the border to Ethiopia (a main supplier of goods) closed. We anticipate an increase in the number of families who will request tuition assistance in 2021.

Curriculum and other changes

During their time sequestered on our closed campus, *Abaarso's faculty reinvented multiple sectors of the school*: shifting all 60 classes toward competencies-based grading with accompanying curriculum maps; creating a housing system for student life; recreating the organizational structure of the school; and redesigning Study Hall and Enrichment periods.

Upon their return, students encountered a very different academic program than the one they remembered from March. Every course now has a *fully fledged curriculum map based on competencies*. Students were therefore given several competencies-based



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assessments to determine their grade placement. These measured skills in math, reading fluency, literary analysis, reading comprehension, group discussion, Somali, science, and essay writing. Due to this new shift, and the fact that our students had been out of school for seven months, ***nearly 50% of students in each grade were asked to repeat the year*** rather than move on to the next grade.

Students now encounter *higher standards in their classes*. These are now graded using a competency-based grading system where bi-weekly unit assessments count for 60% of the grade. Today, irrespective of overall GPA, no student is allowed to move onto the next grade with an F in any of their classes. We also removed English and Math A and B class streams, creating *mixed-level classrooms* wherein everyone is judged by the same competencies. At the same time, Abaarso has created opportunities for 11th and 12th graders to choose different classes: STEM or humanities-focused history; calculus or statistics for math; chemistry or environmental science for science; and calculus-based physics or non-calculus-based physics for 12th graders.

These changes are supported by an *increase in Study Hall* options from one to four per day. Additionally, the school created a *Thursday Enrichment Program* through which students can attend different academic centers for extra help to develop their competencies. These are: a writing center, communication center, math center, Somali center, and literary analysis center.

Notably, we also have *removed the 0.6 point GPA weighting* that students previously received for taking Advanced classes. Given this, while preceding years' GPAs were calculated out of a possible 4.33 (Standard), 4.66 (Mixed), or 5.0 (all Advanced), on the 2019- 2020 transcript the 12th grade marks will not reflect any weighting and all students will have a GPA calculated out of a maximum of 4.33. (The .33 allows for recognition of earning an A+.) The rigor of a student's course load is still clear by noting how many classes are marked as Advanced. As ever, no Abaarso classes or projects are curved.

The 12th grade curriculum is far more rigorous than in years past, complete with many projects that represent the pinnacle of their Abaarso academic experience. 12th graders must complete a 10-page history research paper and presentation, design a scientific experiment and write a 10-page lab report in physics, and write a 10-page English paper. Students also must complete a capstone project that includes a formal proposal, a 10-page research paper, bi-monthly reflections, a community project, and an end-of year presentation to parents and Abaarso supporters in Hargeisa. *Students must complete all these projects, plus their campus internships, while also preparing university applications.*

A different transcript

What do these changes mean for a 12th grader's transcript this year? First, it means their *2020-2021 course grades are likely to be lower than previous years* due to stricter grading standards for each of the competencies, larger class projects and research



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expectations, the removal of the GPA weighting, and due to the fact that they lost seven months of education thanks to the effects of COVID-19 in Somaliland. In addition, we

have *removed a 10% participation assessment* that students received for each class prior to 2020.

Second, students now have an *academic and a leadership section on their transcripts*. The academic section displays their in-class progress while the leadership section will attest to their character as well as provide feedback from their internship advisor. Leadership is now a significant class for 12th graders with an assessment made according to a formal rubric that is described on the second page of our transcript.

Third, we have *stopped providing a four-year cumulative GPA* since the yearly GPAs will have been calculated differently for this year's applicants in 9th-11th grades compared to 12th grade.

Thank you!

We know that all the turmoil of the past several months has impacted you and your offices as well. We deeply appreciate the support admissions officers like you have shown for Abaarso's students and those around the world. Thank you for your hard work and for giving our students' applications the same careful consideration you always have despite all the additional challenges! Please let us know if we can help to clarify anything described above or read in our students' applications.

Sincerely,

Trudy E. Hall
Headmaster, Abaarso

Laura A. Kaub
Director of Post-Abaarso Experiences