

The High School Years

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The high school years are when many parents stop teaching their children at home. These parents feel overwhelmed by the demands of high school subjects, feel unqualified to teach upper level math and sciences, and begin wondering if their children need the social exposure and athletic opportunities found in public and private high schools. Also, there is the question of accreditation and transcripts for students wishing to go to college. Last, but not least, during the high school years children begin expressing themselves much more forcefully and it would be easier for parents to let someone else require schoolwork from a teen who is going through mood swings or becoming argumentative. We want to encourage you to do all you can to keep your child at home during the high school years. If you find your resolve drooping, your vision dimming, your enthusiasm waning, listen to Josh Harris's tape *Why Home School Through High School* or Ellyn Davis' tape *Charting a Course for High School*, or read *Dumbing Us Down* by John Gatto. The teen years are crucial to the identification and legitimizing of a child, and we can't afford to let others set our children's life course for them.

1. Options for High School

There seem to be three common teaching options for high school. First, the textbook route. Parents who want their children to go to college and who are unsure about how to cover all the requirements at home often choose to buy each year's curriculum from a Christian publisher who produces textbooks that parallel the scope and sequence of the public schools. The second option is the non-textbook route, where the necessary core subjects and electives are covered by using alternative, non-textbook resources. The final option is a combination of textbooks and alternative resources which together cover all essential requirements.

There are four basic decisions that must be made no matter which teaching option is chosen:

a. Picture the child's future. Most parents can tell by the time their child is 12 or 13 whether he/she is suited for a profession or trade. This is when we have to be realistic. Even though we might want our son to become a doctor or lawyer, he might do better as an auto mechanic. We need to map out the high school years as a "career pathway" that lays a foundation for what will serve our sons and daughters well as adults. If college is in their future, there are certain course requirements that must be met. If college is not in their future, there are still state requirements that must be met and an emphasis on certain courses important to the child's future. Your state Board of Education can provide you with high school course requirements, and your state's Board of Regents has a list of college entrance requirements.

b. Map out a course of study. The average high school credit requires 180 hours of study. This study can be accomplished through textbooks or through independent projects you devise yourself. If using a non-traditional approach, you will have to decide your own "course requirements" such as: What will this course entail? What will have to be done for the work to be considered completed? What constitutes an A, a B, a C, in this course? Some parents gear the course work to the PSAT, SAT, ACT, or achievement tests and "teach to the tests," others cover the required number of course credits in a way that best suits their family.

c. Devise a record keeping system. You will need to devise some sort of transcript that shows the number of credits in each subject and the grades in each course. The closer you can make this look like a traditional high school transcript, the better. It also helps to keep a portfolio of selected projects and a list of extracurricular activities like church work, 4-H, apprenticeship opportunities, etc. The Home Schooler's High School Journal is a good record keeping system for high school because it helps you keep track of credit hours in each course. *Relaxed Record Keeping* and *Record Keeping for High School* have ideas for developing transcripts from non-traditional course work.

d. Find out what your state homeschooling organization offers. In Tennessee the state organization arranges diplomas, graduation ceremonies, and awards for graduating seniors. These not only give special recognition to the graduates, but also give the kind of legitimacy to home schooling that is so reassuring to relatives and to the state. Your organization may

provide similar services.

2. How Do We Earn Credits?

The number of high school credits needed for graduation vary from state to state, but most states require a minimal number of high school credits. This minimum is shown in the following chart.

Credits Required for High School Graduation

Language Arts 3 - 4 Science 2 Math 2-3 Social Studies 2 - 3
Fine Arts/Language 1 U.S. History 1 Economics 1/2 World History 1
Government 1/2 Electives 7 - 9 Physical Education (Includes health) 2

This list reflects the minimum requirements for most states.

What do these credits mean? Usually one credit in a particular subject (for example, one credit in Language Arts) means that a class was offered in that subject for 50 minutes each school day for a school year (180 days) and that the student attended that class for 165 of the 180 days it was offered and performed work in that class to the teacher's satisfaction.

First, let's examine the concept of a high school credit in more detail. Let's say your child needed one high school credit in Language Arts. If we multiply 50 minutes (the length of class time each day) by 150 days (the number of days the student actually attended the class, assuming the student was allowed 15 absences a year and another 15 classroom periods were spent with assemblies, pep rallies, substitute teachers, non-learning activities, etc.) we get 126 hours of actual class time toward that credit. However, we know that in a typical classroom less than half of the time is spent in learning activities. The other half is spent settling down the class, discussing assignments, taking up or giving out papers, dealing with trouble-makers, and so on.

This means that out of that year of class time in Language Arts, teaching (and presumably learning) was actually occurring for less than 63 hours. Add 20 minutes of homework in that class three days a week and that adds another 36 hours of learning time. So a high school credit actually reflects roughly 100 hours of work in a particular subject, if that much. (When we have talked to former school teachers, they agree that 100 hours is a generous estimate.)

The second thing we need to examine is what a credit of work in a subject represents. For example, if our subject is Language Arts, usually the high school level courses are such things as "A Survey of Western Literature," or "American Literature," or "Short Stories, Poetry, and Plays," or "Theater," or "Public Speaking," or a general course that includes grammar and composition. The goal for each literature course is for the student to become familiar with the major works of a particular literary genre and to have some understanding of the plot structure of novels, the metric structure of poetry, and the presentation of a play. The goal for the grammar and composition courses is the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively through writing, and the goal for the public speaking course would be to communicate clearly and persuasively when speaking to a group.

Now that we have some understanding of both the amount of time that is involved in earning one high school credit and the goal of the subject studied for that credit, we can develop our own course outlines. For example, suppose we wanted to develop a course similar to "A Survey of Western Literature." We would begin with books like Reading Lists for the College Bound that list the literature major colleges consider most important for high school students to read. We would also find books on using discernment in reading, such as Reading Strands or How to Read a Book. If we picked ten books that represented the best in Western literature, had our child read those books, write brief essays about each according to the ideas in How to Read a Book or discuss each following the format given in Reading Strands, this could easily take 100 hours and earn one high school credit in Language Arts. We would represent that credit hour on our home-made transcript as "Survey of Western Literature."

As far as grades are concerned, we are free to establish our own guidelines, since that's what school teachers do. In a public school, the teachers are free to decide how they will grade their classes (how much credit for homework, for tests, for classroom participation, for the final exam, etc.) and they are also free to choose whether they will grade "on the curve" (which means grades are determined by the class average) or on a strict numerical value. One way we can grade would be on the effort expended and the quality of the papers and discussion. If this seems too subjective, we could clearly define grading before the course began in ways like: read 10 books and write/give 10 reports equals an A; 8 books and 8 reports equals a B; 6 books and 6 reports equals a C.

Because our student is earning a course credit based on spending 100 hours of time, this 100 hours can be spread over two weeks, two months, or two years. When and how the credit is earned is not the issue; covering the material is. We could even design the course so that it provides only half a credit. In high schools with a semester system, courses are often only given for one semester, so they count for half a credit each. Half a credit courses are even easier for home schoolers to

design because they only represent 50 hours or less of work.

High school credits can be earned in other ways than through reading books. Our children have all the Language Arts and Fine Arts credits in theater they will ever need because they have been in several productions at our community playhouse and each production requires at least 100 hours of rehearsal and performance time. They have an intimate understanding of the many aspects of presenting a play, from auditions, to memorizing a script, to making scenery, to setting props, and more. Our boys also take dance classes and horseback riding lessons, and we count the lessons and all practice as Physical Education. In addition, they also listen to many books on tape as we travel, and the listening and subsequent discussions in the car can be counted toward course work. One well-researched term paper can easily require 50 to 100 hours of work and be credited in Language Arts as "Grammar and Composition."

Examples of other non-traditional ways to earn high school credits would be:

- a. "Career Choices." Course requirements: Work through some of the books on career choices such as *Finding the Career That Fits You*, and arrange to work for a set period of time at some of the careers that spark an interest.
- b. "Shop." Course requirements: Build something functional like bookcases, a table, a gardening shed, a stall in the barn, etc. Maintain some equipment, such as the lawnmower, the car, etc. Credit hours are given depending on the number of hours spent on the project.
- c. "Economics." Course requirements: Open checking and savings accounts. Manage these accounts faithfully for a specified period. Be responsible for purchasing for the household within certain categories (examples: food, clothing, gas) according to a budget. In addition there are many books on economics that have been helpful to homeschoolers.
- d. "Philosophy." Course requirements: Study the various world views influencing us today through such books as *Understanding the Times* or *The Universe Next Door*. Write a paper discussing your own world view. If you combined the world view study with a study of cultures and civilizations holding those world views and the historical rise of each world view, you could count this course as "World History."
- e. "Public Speaking." Course requirements: Join the 4-H public speaking club and attend their meetings. Enter the 4-H public speaking contest at the county level and be prepared to go on to the district and state levels. Alternate requirements: Prepare several speeches or talks and invite friends and family to come to hear you speak or prepare an audition piece for a play.

Many more ideas for developing course work and granting high school credits for all of your child's learning activities are found in the books *Senior High: A Home Designed Form-U-Ia* and *Homeschooling the High Schooler*.

3. What about the really hard courses?

Foreign languages and higher level math and sciences are only an issue if the student plans to attend a four year college, and even then colleges vary in the number of credits they require. Most parents can tell by the time their child is 12 or 13 whether that child is college material, junior college material, technical school material, or "get-a-job" material. Check with potential colleges to determine the actual number of credits required for acceptance. If the college requires a heavy load of credits in foreign languages and higher level math and sciences, all of these courses are available from traditional textbook publishers. In addition, Abeka, The School of Tomorrow, and The Chalk Dust Company produce teaching videos in subjects like Chemistry, Physics, Advanced Algebra, Calculus, and foreign languages. However, the easiest way to pick up course credits in these subjects is take them at your local community college. Many home schoolers take their junior and senior years in high school at a community college under a dual enrollment plan and get both high school and college credit for their coursework.

4. Studying to the Tests

Most prep schools design their senior high courses around preparing for the SAT or ACT. These schools are in the business of getting their students into Ivy League Colleges, and the only way they can do this is to make sure the students score high on the tests that determine college admissions. Therefore the better high schools tend to "teach to the tests." Home schoolers can take the same approach. We can get SAT and ACT test preparation books and design our senior high courses around preparing for these tests. Another thing we can do is gear senior high courses to the CLEP or Advanced Placement Tests. These are tests the child takes that count for college credit. Many home schooling high school students (including the famous Colfaxes whose sons received scholarships to Ivy League colleges) turn their high school years into studying for and taking one CLEP or Advanced Placement Test after another. Some of these students are finding they can exempt most of the course work in their first two years of college. An excellent book of strategy for high schoolers is *How to Get Into the Top Colleges*. Written by people who run a consulting firm for parents who want their children admitted to the better colleges, this book gives an inside story on what colleges look for and a step-by-step program for high school that

virtually guarantees admission to any college.

5. Beyond Academics

Christian home schoolers are interested in much more than academics, so our course of study for high schoolers might include the following in addition to the core curriculum:

A. Courses helpful for succeeding in the World:

- 1). Life Skills (includes how to shop, drive a car, use a library, file an income tax form, find what we need, read a map, fix a flat, basic machine maintenance, handling stress, etc.)
- 2). Home Economics (how to shop, do laundry, clean, cook, sew, skills associated with running a household)
- 3). Social Skills (carrying on a conversation, manners, proper ways of addressing and interacting with people, some sort of social service)
- 4). Consumer Math (basic everyday math including how to manage money, balance a checkbook, simple accounting, how to operate on a budget)
- 5). Self Understanding (understanding of strengths and weaknesses, skills and deficiencies, proper ways of deriving self-esteem, etc.)
- 6). Logic and Thinking Skills (recognizing fallacies in arguments and discussions, thinking clearly, etc.)

B. Courses helpful for succeeding in Family Life:

- 1). Marriage Preparation (relating to a husband or a wife, childcare, sex education, handling stress, etc.)
- 2). Family Relationships (the proper roles of husband, wife, and child, how to build rich family relationships)

C. Courses helpful for succeeding as an Employee:

- 1). Typing
- 2). Office Management
- 3). Computer Skills

D. Courses helpful for succeeding as an Employer:

- 1). Social Skills (includes same as above Social Skills plus how to motivate people, dealing with different kinds of workers, time management, marketing, developing long range plans, etc.)
- 2). Office Management Skills (includes consumer math, typing, computer, and accounting skills, tax preparation)

E. Courses helpful for succeeding as a Christian:

- 1). Bible and Spiritual Studies (how to study the Bible, use a concordance and Bible study helps, reading of biographies of Christians, applying biblical principles to everyday life, developing of character)
- 2). Understanding of Gifting (recognizing God-given spiritual abilities and talents, knowing "who I am" spiritually)

6. But What About College?

Many home schooling parents are not sure their children should go to college. One of the reasons is the cost, which can easily run more than \$15,000 a year for room, board, and tuition. Another reason is that most colleges nurture world views and behaviors that are in conflict with all that Christian home schooling parents try to instill in their children. It doesn't make sense to spend eighteen years instructing a child and then send that child to a place that undermines all you have taught. A third reason is that graduating from college no longer means that a person is highly educated. More than half of all college seniors fail general knowledge tests of basic history and literature. Also, a college education no longer guarantees financial success, nor is a degree essential to getting a good job. Seventy percent of all the jobs in the United States require only on-the-job training or some other form of alternative education. None of the twenty career fields listed by the U.S. Department of Labor as the fastest growing occupations require a four year degree. For these and other reasons many home schooling families are considering alternatives to college.

Harvey Unger in *But What If I Don't Want to Go to College* says there are really only two good reasons to send a child to a traditional four-year college: First, the child has a deep desire to study academic subjects such as history, literature, or philosophy. Second, he has a deep commitment to career goals that require a four-year degree (such as medicine or law). Parents should think twice before sending a child to college if the child is unclear about his future plans because statistics show 50% of college students take six years to get their four year degree. Some of these students take longer to graduate because they are working their way through, but many of them take an extra two years to finish because they have no clear idea of their future plans and so they keep changing majors along the way. This means the parents are paying an extra ten to thirty thousand dollars or more because the child has no clear idea why he is going to college. Statistics also show that

fewer than 25% of those who earn college degrees actually find themselves working in their degree field. This is another reason to think twice before sending a child to college.

What are the alternatives to college? The most obvious choice is to simply get a job. A job may take the form of an internship, temporary work, working at home, self employment, or free lancing. What Color is Your Parachute can help your student create a picture of his ideal job. Another resource is Finding the Career That Fits You from Larry Burkett's Christian Financial Concepts. This program will help your student identify his gifts, talents, and interests.

A second option is to get specialized training. Alternative education is available through community colleges, vocational-technical schools, on-the-job training, etc. The book But What If I Don't Want to Go to College lists the eleven types of alternative education available, gives the advantages and disadvantages of each, and includes guidelines for evaluating any program that you might find locally.

A third option is to home school through college. This is not as difficult as it sounds. Bear's Guide to Non-Traditional Degrees lists many universities requiring little or no residency. You can also design your own course of study and get college credit for your course work because many colleges now give credits for life experiences and allow course exemptions based on high scores on advanced placement tests.

The fourth option is to help your young person start his own business. Several home schooling leaders suggest that launching your child into business is a better investment than paying for four years of college tuition. If the typical college education costs upwards of fifty thousand dollars, would a wiser use of that money be to invest in a business for your child, or better still, simply to invest the money? One of the astonishing things about investments is that investment income can significantly dwarf employment income. What this means is that a consistent system of cautious investing over the long term (30 to 40 years) can result in much more money than the average person will have earned in the same period of time.

A similar option to launching your child into business would be to use the college money to buy income-generating property, such as rental housing, duplexes, or apartments that your child can manage. This way he or she will not only have a place to live, but will also have an ongoing source of income.

The final alternative is apprenticeship. Apprenticeship traditionally consisted of four stages. The novice observed an expert while generally assuming the role of a servant. He learned the technology and mastered the techniques of the craft. A college education used to provide this stage of training but no longer does because it lacks any practical application of work. The journeyman, so called because this stage originally involved travel, worked in several shops to master specialized applications of basic skills. The medical student in internship and residency is a good example of this stage. The craftsman owned his own business, and, in direct proportion to his ability to train others, became a master. Choosing apprenticeship is a way to enter a profession without getting a standard four year degree.

7. Preparing for Adulthood

The end product of our home schooling efforts is for our children to be capable of assuming the adult responsibilities of a Christian man or woman. As we have studied the Bible, we've concluded that these responsibilities are:

The Biblical responsibilities of a man:

- a. To be a visible representative of God's nature
- b. To provide for his household
- c. To love and understand his wife
- d. To raise his children in the ways of God
- e. To provide leadership at home and in the community
- f. To participate in the Church of Jesus Christ

The Biblical responsibilities of a woman:

- a. To be a faithful example of a godly woman
- b. To respect, love, and be a helper to her husband
- c. To bear, nourish, and love children
- d. To creatively and effectively manage a household
- e. To teach younger women godly qualities
- f. To participate in the Church of Jesus Christ

Once we know what God considers important, it is helpful to also know what the world considers important, so that our children can function well "in the world," without being "of the world." A recent survey of "What Employers Want" indicated that employers are looking for workers who can:

- a. Manage their time. (arrive on time for work or appointments, use their on-the-job time productively, use their time to the advantage of the company)
- b. Follow instructions. (do a job the way they have been shown or told, ask questions if they don't understand, don't change procedures without asking permission, the ability to read and follow printed instructions, etc.)
- c. Cooperate with others. (respect supervisors, get along with fellow workers, react constructively to conflict situations with customers, other employees, or bosses)
- d. Demonstrate excellence and thoroughness in their work. (bring a job to quality completion, take pride in doing a good job, demonstrate motivation to achieve)
- e. Show initiative. (recognize potential problems, see what needs to be done and do it without being told)

As people who own their own business, we thoroughly agree with this list. Also, if you plan to own your own business you will need those employee skills, because you will essentially be your own employee until your business grows to the point where you have to hire others to help. In addition, here is our "top five" list of abilities for those who plan to become bosses:

- a. The ability to manage time. (Not only to meet deadlines and get to appointments on time, but also to plan ahead so that what needs to be done gets done when it needs to get done and the ability to prioritize our use of time. So often a home business becomes "the hobby that ate up our lives." Its demands can usurp family time, personal time, friend time, and God time.)
- b. The ability to handle stress. (This includes knowing our limits physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially; knowing how to relax, keeping the "big picture" in view when the details are driving you crazy, developing satisfying hobbies, constructively dealing with anger and time pressure, etc.)
- c. The ability to handle money. (Owning your own business is always financially risky. Great care must be taken with money. Making money can never be the primary motive for your business, because then you will make rash decisions out of fear or greed.)
- d. The ability to perform almost any office function. (No matter what your business, if it grows you will eventually be doing word processing, data entry, spreadsheets, basic accounting, filing, data management, etc. It's easier to already know how to do these things than it is to learn as you go.)
- e. The ability to get along with difficult people. (There will always be someone who rubs you the wrong way, who tries to take advantage of you, or who misinterprets your actions. Good social skills and knowing how to deal constructively with conflict are essential. If you have employees, you will also have to develop good people-management skills.)

8. How Do We Pull It All Together?

The Elijah Company catalog contains a wealth of resources to help you "pull it all together." Visit the website www.elijahcompany.com or call 1-888-235-4524 for a catalog.

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