

The Homeschool High School Motto: "Always Be Prepared"

By Lee Binz

High school can be like driving on autopilot—when you arrive at your destination but don't remember anything about the trip! When you homeschool high school sometimes life goes by and your child is a senior before you know what happened.

On Tuesday a panicked parent of a senior in high school called. "I'm in a bind! I just found out that I need a high school transcript to go with my child's college application by Thursday. Can you help?" As much as I would love to help everyone all the time, sometimes it's not possible unless parents plan ahead. Planning ahead allows for the possibility of college.

College preparation is critical for students who plan on going to college. College-bound students need course work that will prepare them. Students need college admission tests, and parents need to learn about grades and credits. College preparation for college bound students is expected.

What can college preparation provide for students who will *not* go to college? Why bother getting your kids ready for college when you feel certain they won't go? Consider for a moment how many times your children have changed their minds. When you least expect it, on almost any topic, teenagers will change their minds. Stop laughing! You know it's true! And teenagers may even change their minds about going to college.

The Non-College Bound

Rigorous academics can benefit children even if they are not heading to college. When high school may be their only formal education, you want it to be the best! Focusing on requirements for the college bound will ensure challenging academics, rather than doing the minimum. Excellence boils down to keeping your children challenged, not achieving a certain prescribed level. Calculus does not make the difference between a college-bound and non-college-bound teen. Instead, learning how to learn is what prepares a child for college and for life.

Teenagers are moving targets, and it's hard to know exactly where they will end up in their lives. My good friend was convinced that her child was not college bound. Her child experienced some learning challenges, hated math, and loved working with anything mechanical. She was convinced he would become a mechanic right up until the day he changed his mind. "Mom," he declared, "I've decided to be an engineer!"

Life would be much easier if our children would just make up their minds once and stick to it! Unlike changing dinner plans from enchiladas to spaghetti, changing from "vocational training" to "college preparation" is a little more challenging. By planning a college-prep high school, you don't have to worry so much about changing plans. You and your student will be ready for anything.

Engage the Culture

At times it's not the child who is hesitant about college; it is the parent. Should Christians allow their children to go to college? After all, college is filled with faulty humans—both students and faculty. But without the availability of college education, our modern lifestyle would be impossible. Someone needs to build the airplanes we rely on and care

for us in the hospital. I hope those people are highly skilled Christians with integrity, values, and knowledge. College education is a requirement for some careers. For many people and for many reasons, college is the next step after high school.

It's a challenge for homeschooling parents, however. We spend much of our homeschool years explaining to people the reasons we keep our children safe at home. Those reasons don't change when our children grow up. Instead, it's our children that change. In fact, they become adults. The Bible says:

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things
(1 Corinthians 13:11).

Adults must interact with a fallen world on a regular basis. Firm in their faith, adult Christians are able to negotiate the contrasting world views with their own beliefs intact. At some point, your child will be ready to "become a man" (or woman) and move on into adult life—and that may include college, depending on the purpose God has given them. When our children are grown up, it's difficult to cope with them leaving the nest. Our job is not to parent our children forever. Our job is to train up children in the way they should go. When they become adults, we are to encourage them to engage the culture and change the world, as Jesus said.

. . . Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature
(Mark 16:15).

The Great Commission comes directly from the Lord. That verse just screams for our attention. It doesn't say "Go into all the world, but not college." It doesn't say "Preach the good news to everyone except to those on college campuses." If college is in your child's future, prepare him to face challenges as a mature adult. Don't be afraid of college. If that is the Lord's calling, he can proceed with faith. Parents don't throw their children into the lions' den either. Mature Christians don't generally choose to hang out in bars or clubs for fun. In the same way, you can carefully choose their college, weighing the options. A Christian college, or a college with a strong Christian presence, can provide an adult challenge for your adult children without overwhelming them with debauchery.

Our History and Their Future

College plans can materialize out of nowhere. As parents, we know what we know, and we know the plans God made for our own lives. Sometimes we forget that our children may have their own plan and mission for the future. If college didn't make sense for us, it's natural to think it won't be a fit for our child. But if college suddenly becomes the next step, you'll be thankful their high school years prepared them. Instead of focusing on your academic history, focus on providing flexibility for your student's academic future. Preparing our high school students for college will help them to be prepared for anything.

For reluctant students, consider this strategy I learned over the years. At some point along the way, teenagers will usually stumble on some career idea that might require some college. When they mention an idea like that, try to grab on to it: "You want to work in finance? That's a great idea!" Then explain how their goal might require some college. Even if they change their mind, you can still encourage them, "Honey, just in case you decide to work in finance again, let's get prepared for that." Encouraging teenagers to focus on their loftiest career goals can keep them focused on college planning. If they used that preparation to go to college, that's great! If they don't go to college, they are still well prepared for any career in their future.

Always Be Prepared

Preparing your students for college can help them if they go to college, and it can also help them if they don't. Some children waffle back and forth before deciding about future plans, and rigorous academics can help you be prepared. You can prepare your children for college as part of your homeschool, taking to heart the Boy Scout motto, "Always be prepared." Providing a college prep education is not terribly complicated. You can continue to homeschool the same way you always have, learning with reckless abandon. You don't have to change your curriculum or give tests in every subject or chain your student to a desk. Homeschoolers of every stripe have been successful with college admission. Don't change what has always worked for you; just set your eyes on colleges so you have the ultimate flexibility when your student graduates.

Preparation Is Harmless

Plan for college and provide rigorous high school academics. If they use it to go to college—great! If they don't use it for college, does the hard work go to waste? Not at all! College preparation can help your child be a better employee or entrepreneur, a wiser citizen, and a more confident homeschool parent. Preparing for college can't hurt your child, and it can provide flexibility for the future.

Each year in the spring I get phone calls and emails from panicky senior-year parents. "Help!" they cry. "I haven't prepared, and my daughter needs to go to college!" It's a difficult situation that can catch parents unprepared. Instead, consider the other parents who contact me for help. Parents with students in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade nervously reach out for information and find out it's not as difficult to prepare their children for college as they may have expected. When I talk with nervous parents who have students in middle school and early high school, I can almost guarantee they will be successful. Starting college preparation early can allow time for mistakes and restarts. Gaps can be filled and dilemmas solved easily when you have the luxury of time. Preparation can only help. It will do no harm.

Live without regrets. Be prepared for anything because with teenagers "anything" can happen!

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