

Planning the High School Years

Diana Johnson

There is something very comfortable about homeschooling elementary-age children. Our goals are easily understood. Teach a child to read and to love it. Build a basic fluency in math operations and concepts. Lay a foundation of history and science upon which future studies will anchor. Shape character with Bible reading and memory work. Pray that God will create within our child a heart that loves Him with sincerity. Success is possible, we trust, with God's help.

During this time we are the chief evaluators of our efforts. If not totally satisfied with our progress, we still have plenty of time for polishing. Then high school looms and our confidence often evaporates. We realize how close we are to ending our homeschool adventure with this child. The world, in the guise of a college admissions officer or an employer, will soon be evaluating whether we have succeeded at our homeschooling task. How absolutely frightening!

Fortunately, we can dilute this fear by carefully planning the high school years. This involves understanding the expectations that await our students when these four short years are over. These expectations may differ significantly from those of our personal homeschool. We may find it necessary to adapt ourselves and our ways.

As homeschoolers, we have often spent the elementary years individualizing for the needs of the student. Soon the personalities of professors and employers and the requirements of college course syllabi and job descriptions will place different demands and expectations on our students. Our students will need to gain some facility at learning and expressing themselves in all learning modes, not only the ones most comfortable for them.

Students will be required to take in and give back information in every style imaginable. Sometimes a rote recall of facts will be all that is necessary. Another time a thoughtful analysis of information with reasonable conclusions drawn will be required. Group projects will require a cooperative team spirit. The ability to skillfully express oneself orally, in writing, and through the work of one's hands will often be needed. These skills, so necessary for the college classroom, will be equally applicable in the workforce.

In addition to learning and performing in different modes, our students will be expected to have a solid core of information from which to draw. E.D. Hirsch's book of 1988, *Cultural Literacy*, was a timely reminder of that fact. Individuals, in order to both understand and function within the society in which they live, must understand the thoughts and ideas that have forged its identity. In our rapidly expanding global environment, the need to understand cultures outside of our comfortable western ways also becomes necessary. Add to this the ability to evaluate the diverse influences of the world through the filter of God's wisdom, and we have a formidable task! How do we accomplish all of this? By understanding the steps toward the goal and willingly and faithfully plodding toward it.

The first step is planning an equitable high school program. Start the process by finding out what courses a college admissions officer or employer will expect your student to have taken. State regulations, the suggested high school course of study from your local high school or state board

of education, and college catalogs or admission packets can all provide a foundation upon which to build. With information in one hand, choose what courses to take and when.

Once basic courses are chosen, the time to individualize the program begins. Plan a careful blend of functionality and creative individualization. Basic courses may be pragmatically chosen, but they can be creatively individualized through the materials chosen to teach each class. Although textbooks, tests, and research papers may play a larger part in your program than in elementary years, you can still indulge a love for living books or hands-on activities. In addition, elective classes, chosen to strengthen a student's weaknesses and enhance individual talents, can be a highly creative part of any high school program.

After the program is planned and materials are chosen, establish an objective means for crediting and grading the student's work. A lack of objectivity in crediting and grading can be a problem for homeschoolers. It is an area where our lack of experience often shows itself. As homeschoolers, we are not schooling several hundred students whose work we can compare for quality. Yet when our student starts his first college semester or begins a career, he may find himself being evaluated by such standards. He needs to have some idea of how he will compare. An accurate assessment of your student's strengths and weaknesses will help him enter the college classroom or workforce with a realistic self-understanding.

Helping your student understand himself is not the only benefit of objective standards. Grades recorded on your student's high school transcript should have a reasonable agreement with the scores earned on college entrance tests. If there is a wide divergence between the two and high grades are not backed up by equally impressive test scores, you will undermine the credibility of your high school program.

Finally, plan a program that will prepare your student, if abilities allow, for additional training beyond high school. Although college is the most common next step, reputable trade schools or an apprenticeship with a well respected tradesman can also be workable options. There is ample proof that individuals limited to a high school education are at a severe disadvantage in the workforce. We do not want our children to be counted in these sad statistics. In addition, God in His sovereignty does not tell us the details of His plan for the children He has entrusted to us. Young men that are not inclined to pursue college may change their mind after a few years in a low-paying job. Our girls, though desiring to be wives and mothers, may find themselves single. Sometimes through hardship or unexpected widowhood they may find themselves in the role of breadwinner. Preparedness now for unexpected possibilities could prevent the poverty-level existence often brought on by a lack of job skills or education. God does not promise us an easier existence in this life than Christ endured. We must prepare our students the best we can for an unknown future.

Due to the brief nature of a magazine article, I have chosen to present the big picture of high school planning. For help with the nitty-gritty details, consider my book, *Home-Designed High School*. Information is presented in a concise and easy-to-understand manner for homeschoolers overwhelmed with their upcoming high school adventure. It provides help in planning an individualized course of study with the student's future goals in mind. Objective methods for crediting and grading courses are offered, along with examples that illustrate how to use these

methods with textbook, living book, and project-based courses. Also included are transcript preparation, GPA calculation, testing, and scholarship information and an overview of the types of records often requested by colleges. A large section is devoted to the homeschool curriculum available that can help you meet your academic goals. If you are interested in more information, it can be found on my website, www.homedesignedschooling.com. In my next and final article, we will consider college. Until then!

Biographical Information

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