



# The Beginner's Guide to Homeschooling Through High School



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Unbound is a project-based education company that provides coaching, hands-on experience, life skill development, and relevant resources for students and homeschooling groups.

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# Introduction

As a homeschooling parent, you've taken full ownership of your student's education and you've done an excellent job. They're now on the verge of entering those formative high school years. Maybe you're scared stiff. Perhaps you're excited but part of you is concerned about the high task of teaching your student through high school and preparing them for the journey beyond.

Don't worry! You're not alone and you're not the first homeschool parent to do this. The homeschool community is full of people who have successfully walked the path before you and are more than willing to share their insights.

We've gathered the insights of several homeschool parents and other resources and compiled them here, in the *Beginner's Guide to Homeschooling Through High School*.

# Your Changing Role

# 01



One big roadblock that discourages parents from homeschooling their students through high school is a feeling of inadequacy to teach. High school subject matter is more advanced and this can be intimidating to a homeschool parent that may feel confident teaching some subjects but not others. For example, advanced high school math can turn someone off from homeschooling through high school due to the sheer complexity of the subject matter.

This is understandable. Unless a parent has been formally trained to teach high school, it can be a daunting task. The good news is that if your student loves learning, they can often work independently with the guidance of a well-written curriculum.

Alison G., one homeschool mother we talked to, said that her goal in homeschooling her children has always been for them to develop a love of learning. As your high-schooler begins to learn responsibility and independence, this love for learning will help them take ownership of their classes. This helps take the burden off of you, the parent, to know and teach all the subject matter.

As a homeschooling parent of a high school student, your role is transitioning from “teacher” to “guide/coach”. You’re helping point your student in the direction of good resources that will help them learn the necessary skills for life.

It’s especially important to ask questions of your student during this season of their life. Asking questions helps nurture critical thinking and independence. It challenges your student to really think about their future, what they want to do, and how they want to prepare for it.

# Curriculum

# 02



The resources you use are very much up to you. If you've been homeschooling for a while you probably have some favorite curriculums that you've used with your kids. If your favorite curriculum provides high school resources, you can certainly start there in finding resources that will fit well with your student.

Don't be discouraged though if you can't make an easy and seamless curriculum transition into high school. Many families compile their own custom curriculum from "bits and pieces" of other curriculums.

Furthermore, high school students often require a more customized curriculum.

Patty W., a veteran homeschool mom of three, says that each child will require their own unique approach. High school is a formative time in your child's life. It's the time when their passions and identities are really developing.

For example, one of her daughters wanted to pursue a career in nursing. Patty customized her high school curriculum to include community college classes that would prepare her student for further education in the nursing field. In fact, she says, her student used community college classes for close to 95% of her high school education.

When you get to high school, with all the beautifully unique aspects of your student, there's no "one-size-fits-all" solution. Alison G. points out that each child requires special attention and a customized curriculum.

That's not to say that there aren't some widely respected curricula that have appealed to a broad range of homeschoolers. Joy M. recommends [Teaching Textbooks](#) for math and Apologia for science. Patty W. seconded the recommendation for [Apologia](#) and added some of her favorites: [Abeka](#) and [Veritas Press](#). Joy said she would glean insights from other homeschool parents in her community and would often utilize the used curriculum tables at her state homeschool conventions.

Alison's recommendations have more to do with the homeschooling approach. Books like [The High School Handbook](#) (Mary Schofield), [Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual Junior/Senior High](#) (Cathy Duffy), [Senior High: A Home-Designed FORM+U+LA](#) (Barbara Shelton), [The Well-Educated Mind](#) (Susan Wise Bauer), and [The Joyful Homeschooler](#) (Mary Hood) helped her excel in homeschooling her students through high school.

Joy also recommends inviting your students into the curriculum selection process.

She says, "Each of my kids went with me to the [convention] at least one time, which gave them more opportunity to choose books themselves for the coming year. Involving them in the process was one of the best decisions I ever made. Kids have to want to learn for homeschooling to really be effective, so asking them for input is crucial. Remember that they are bright and capable, and invite them to enter into the process with you. They have great ideas, and they know what they like."

Overall, be aware that your high school student will probably need a curriculum that is customized to their strengths and weaknesses and their future desired educational path.



# Transcripts

03



Another source of intimidation for homeschooling parents is the fearsome transcript. This document doesn't need to cause stress. It may seem daunting but there are best practices that can make this process very straightforward.

A transcript is essentially an academic record. It's used in the college admissions process as a guide for academic evaluation and proof that your student is academically prepared for more advanced study. It's essentially your student's grades during high school.

The transcript document is intimidating because of its formality. For many homeschool parents who haven't had to deal with a formal transcript before, the officialness of the document can lead to anxiety.

If you're intimidated by the formality of an official transcript, start small. Simply keep records of your student's work in a notebook. No fancy formatting required. Alison even advises homeschool parents to keep records of their children's work before they reach high school.

She says that record-keeping can be very simple. Just write down a description of the class, your student's grade, and a strengths/weaknesses section. This last section is important for a couple of reasons.

First, it helps you better understand your student's unique learning style. This enables you to better tailor their education to help them achieve their best in the future. It also gives you an idea of what growth opportunities your student has to work on to overcome some weaknesses.

Second, Alison sees the encouragement value of record-keeping. As a mom of six kids, graduating her fourth this year, she says that she can go back to the records of her older children to gain perspective as she continues to teach and train the younger ones. This is inspiring and comforting as she is able to see what her older children went through and how it turned out. Some long-term perspective really does encourage you when you're in the trenches.

Joy also talked about the importance of laying groundwork ahead of time. "Every homeschool parent should have a folder that has a record on one piece of paper at the end of every year of what schoolwork each child has done...This has been invaluable and a vitally important practice for me to track the kids' educational journey, year by year."

Furthermore, there are experienced homeschool parents and educators who have made the transcript process easy with guidance and [templates](#). Joy utilized the [professional services of HSLDA](#) to help put together her first child's transcript and found the small fee quite worthwhile. She found that some Christian colleges even provided her with a template for a homeschool transcript.

If you have the good fortune of being plugged into a homeschooling community or friendships with other homeschool parents, you can glean a lot from their transcript work.

Patty used a template from friends for her children's transcripts. In the age of the internet, you have tremendous access to resources and templates that can make this process simple and stress-free. Just remember to keep records as you go and the final compilation will all come together.

# ACT/SAT Preparation

# 04



Another new experience in high school is advanced testing. There are multiple college preparation exams that high school students can take as they apply for scholarships and college enrollment. The two standard tests are the ACT and the SAT.

The subject matter contents of these tests are fairly similar as they test students on general subjects. There are sections on subjects like math, reading, and English. Each test also includes an optional essay.

If your student wants to pursue academic scholarships they will probably want to study for an optimal score on these exams. Even if your student is just taking these tests for college application reasons, without major scholarship considerations, it's in their best interest to score well.

How can you prepare your student for these exams?

There's great news. There are a number of ACT/SAT prep resources available. You can probably find some resources at your local library. Of course, there are many resources, including practice tests, online as well.

One important element of ACT/SAT prep is learning how to take a test well. It is a skill! Tests like the ACT and SAT don't just test a student's subject knowledge. They also test critical thinking. Learning how to study for and take a test is an early step your student can take as they prepare for these exams.

Test-taking is a skill that can be practiced. Joy's students took the PSAT (a preparation test for the SAT) in their freshman, sophomore, and junior years of high school. This consistency paid off and each student scored high enough to be in the top 1% of test-takers in the nation, earning them the distinction of National Merit Scholars.

That's where the strategy plays in. Alison points out that the PSAT is usually best taken in 10th grade and the ACT and SAT are best taken in 11th grade so that students have a chance to retake during their senior year if necessary. Sitting down with your student and coming up with a testing plan can yield big rewards. Two of Joy's students received full and half-ride scholarships respectively to a major Christian university.

The homeschool parents we spoke with shared their tips for ACT/SAT prep but they also shared that not all their students took the exams in high school. Some were pursuing alternative college paths that didn't require taking the ACT or SAT. It can be helpful to prepare your students for the exams just in case but it's also good to realize that each child's path is going to be different.

Even if your student's peers are studying like crazy for the ACT/SAT exams, make sure your child makes an intentional decision to take these exams. If they do it because "everyone else" is, they may not see the full value of it.

Joy says, "Helping students understand what is at stake is so important. Students have to own their choices, but they need to be informed and aware. When my kids grasped that the sliding scale of scholarship amounts... correlated directly with their SAT score and GPA, this was a powerful incentive and motivator."

When it comes to actually studying the subject matter in preparation for taking the tests, there are a lot of resources. [CollegeBoard.org](https://collegeboard.org) publishes a [“Question of the Day”](#) that can help your student practice their test-taking skills and get to know the types of questions they may encounter on the exams.

Joy also noted that [Khan Academy](https://www.khanacademy.com) was a great resource for studying subject matter on the SAT and ACT exams. Khan Academy and [Test Prep Review](#) also offer practice tests. You can also check with your local homeschool co-op to check availability of ACT/SAT prep classes. Patty utilized local co-op classes with her students.

# College Preparation

# 05



As your student moves towards the end of high school, they're probably starting to think about what's beyond graduation. For a lot of students, college is the next step in their journey but this isn't the case for everyone.

Patty started talking with her daughters early on about their passions and life goals. She said these conversations began when they were in 6th and 7th grade. She says the college preparation process should be more about preparing your student for life beyond school, not just college. This is the time to determine if college is even the right fit for your student and their goals.

Nowadays there are also many alternative college opportunities outside of the traditional college application process. For example, one of Patty's students attended community college classes during high school to get specialized nursing training. Other options include dual credit through credit-by-exam programs like [CLEP](#) or [Dantes/DSST](#).

Credit-by-exam programs give students the opportunity to study college-level material and demonstrate that they have grasped the subject. Many colleges award credit for CLEP scores above a certain level. If your student has good test-taking skills and isn't scared of studying some advanced material, they can take CLEP tests during high school and get most of their general education credits taken care of for college.

Dual credit simply applies these college-level studies to high school as well. For example, if a student takes the Biology CLEP exam, this can be counted on their high school transcript as well. If your student is studying college-level material in preparation for a CLEP exam, why not count it towards their high school requirements?

Some alternative college programs take students much further than getting general ed credits out of the way. One of Joy's students enrolled in college with almost three fourths of her credit transferred to the school from various credit-by-exam tests and other online college classes. It's becoming easier and easier to get access to college courses online, even while your student is in high school.

If your student is pursuing the traditional college path, college applications will be a part of the process. Test scores from the ACT/SAT exams will probably be required in the applications. Each school has different application requirements and processes. Most require students to submit some form of an essay in addition to their test scores and transcripts.

For advanced honors programs and scholarships students may be required to submit additional essays and recommendations from mentors and educators.

If your student is pursuing federal financial aid they will need to submit the [FAFSA](#) (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). This can be done in October before your student's graduation.

It's certainly worth looking into scholarships for your student. College is expensive and scholarships can significantly ease the financial burden of tuition. Encouraging your student in their academics and their writing skills is a great way to prepare them for scholarship applications. Most colleges also offer athletic or music scholarships and your student may choose to pursue these if applicable.

Overall, the college application process may involve a lot of work for you and your student but the benefits of scholarships can make this work worthwhile. Meanwhile, if your student isn't interested in pursuing college, there are plenty of opportunities to find work during high school and start building a resume. Other alternative college paths, like dual credit, can help your student save money and get a head start on their college journey.

For more detailed information on college application requirements Patty recommends checking the [HSLDA website](#), which she found helpful with her students.



# Athletics

06



Athletics is a unique concern for homeschool families. While students enrolled in public or private schools have the opportunity to join sports teams and play, homeschool students don't have easy and direct access to the same kind of athletic programs.

In some states, homeschooled students can be eligible to participate in sports on a public school team. Many times a student's ability to participate in public school athletics is dependent on policies in the school district itself.

There are also a number of homeschool athletic associations across the country for students that are serious about athletics. If this is something your student wants to pursue, you can look up the status of your local and state laws and information about local homeschool athletic associations on the [HSLDA website](#).

Whether your student is seriously pursuing athletics or not, it's important to help them build good physical habits and exercise regularly.

Patty says that although her students didn't pursue traditional team sports, she wanted them to build an active and healthy lifestyle. Her students participated in a gym class organized by local homeschool parents at the local YMCA. This class included dance, swim, and other physical education activities. Two of her daughters also participated in competitive jump-rope.

Alison's family also pursued non-traditional athletic activities. Her daughters participated in horseback riding and swim team at the local community pool. One of her sons now takes martial arts lessons. Joy says her students participated in swimming, soccer, and tennis during high school. They got involved through a local Christian school that accepted homeschooled students on their soccer team.

Other outdoor activities can also help cultivate a healthy lifestyle. Depending on the area you live in there may be tremendous options for hiking, canoeing/kayaking, and biking. The goal for many homeschool parents is to get their students out and living an active lifestyle.

If your student is serious about pursuing athletics beyond high school it may be worthwhile to research your local laws to see what options are available.

# Extracurricular Activities

# 07



For students that aren't naturally drawn to sports, there are also plenty of opportunities for extracurricular activities. There are also scholarship opportunities available with some of these.

For your logic-loving student there's the option of speech and debate. The [NCFCA](#) (National Christian Forensics and Communication Association) affords homeschool students the chance to learn and practice the arts of rhetoric and persuasion through a variety of speech competitions, team policy debate, and Lincoln-Douglas style debate competitions.

Your resident artist or musician also has opportunities to grow their skill and even earn scholarships during high school. Taking art or music lessons can be incorporated into your student's education and yields benefits that can be enjoyed for years to come.

If there's something your student is interested in, chances are you can find a class to help them build skill and experience in that activity. Local community colleges are a great place to find courses for practical skills and trades training.

High school is a time of preparation for your student. This includes some trial-and-error. Let them try out some activities to test their aptitude and appreciation. They may find a new hobby, skill, or passion.

Incorporating extracurricular activities into your student's high school education does more than simply giving them something enjoyable to do. It helps teach them important life skills like communication, adaptability, and discipline.

Developing these "soft" skills in your student will serve them for a long time into the future. Alison says that homeschooling helped her daughters learn discipline and organization. She says these skills have perhaps done more for her daughters as they embark on life than their academics.

Simply holding your student accountable to get their work done by the deadline and keep things organized will teach them more about living in the real world than some academic courses. Extracurricular activities and elective classes give you the opportunity to cultivate these kinds of skills in your student as they grow.

# Community

08



Another big consideration as your student enters high school is community and peer relationships.

This will be a formative period in your student's social life. It's when they branch out and seek deeper friendships outside of your family. It's especially important in this season of their life to help them develop responsible and supportive friendships.

Alison said that this process of building community looked different for different children as her family's lives changed over the years. Her oldest students were plugged into a great community of young people through their local church. She said this was the type of community where "positive peer pressure" happened: her students were inspired to grow and mature through the impact their friends had on them.

When their family moved to a new church, Alison said she had to be more proactive about helping her other children find and develop great friendships. While the oldest two students had almost “stumbled” upon a great community, it took some more intentionality for the rest of her students.

Church and homeschool co-ops are great places to start building community for your high school student. If they participate in extracurricular activities that’s another great place to encourage them to find friendships.

As your student gains more independence they will have more opportunities to build and participate in community. It’s important to talk with your student about their friendships, offering support and encouragement during this formative period of their life.

Spiritual discipleship is also a formative discipline during these high school years. This time in your student’s life is usually when they start to take ownership of what they believe. Provide recommendations of great books for them to read and study.

Community and spiritual discipleship are going to have long-lasting impacts on your student. Encourage them and support them in these things as much as in their academics.



# Final Thoughts

Overall, it can be intimidating to think about homeschooling your student through high school. There are tremendous rewards on the other side of that fear though. Oftentimes, homeschool parents put a lot of needless pressure on themselves.

Patty learned to trust God as she homeschooled her students. She came to realize that she didn't need all the answers right away. Things would work out. She learned to proceed without knowing the final result and stop comparing the way she guided her daughters with the way other parents were homeschooling their students. She encourages parents to, "give yourself the freedom to not know the end." No parent gets it 100% right, she reminds. God does the work so we don't need to be apprehensive. She also says that anxiety will rob parents of the joy of the process of helping their children grow up! For Patty, strong relationships with her daughters was more important than academics.

Alison also encourages homeschool parents to relax. She says that she found that her academic standards for her students were far higher than her friends who had children in private charter schools. This helped her relax and realize that her students were receiving a quality education.

She says that the goal of her homeschooling was always to cultivate a love of learning in her children. She also warned against comparison. The beauty of homeschooling is the flexibility to provide customized education and guidance for your student. She says she wanted to prepare her students for “a productive Christian life, not teaching to a test or to be the same as public schoolers.”

Alison also encourages parents to be open to alternative programs, especially when it comes to college.

Homeschooling through high school can be intimidating. But these veteran homeschool parents have learned that it all works out in the end. When your student steps off that graduation stage, it’s all worth it. The important thing is to develop their character and build a strong relationship with them as they grow and mature.





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