

Reasonable Homeschooling: Home Schooling the High Schooler

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Graduation Requirements

State	Erie	Mason-Dixon
<p>General Diploma (Grades 9-12) 4 years English 3 years Math 3 years Science 3 years Social Studies 2 years Arts &amp; Humanities</p> <p>Additional Requirements (Grades 7-12) English: speech, literature, composition, language Geography SS: Civics, World History, History of United States and Pennsylvania Math: General Math, Algebra, Geometry Art, Music, PE, Health and Safety Fire Safety each year</p>	<p>General Diploma (Grades 9-12) Mirrors the state requirements column exactly</p>	<p>General Diploma (Grades 9-12) Mirrors the state requirements but adds the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 cumulative hours of public speaking</li> <li>• 10 pages of composition per year (no long paper required)</li> <li>• Pass/Fail OK</li> </ul>
	<p>Academic Diploma (Adds 5 more credits) English: includes a 15-book requirement, at HS level, including 1 classic; composition requirement including one long report each year of a specified length (3, 5, 7, 8 pages respectively) Math: Algebra or Geometry (expects the other has been done during 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade)</p>	<p>Academic Honors Diploma Must use letter grades or percentages English: adds extensive reading requirements, literary analysis, and a minimum of 1 research paper Science: must include labs Math: see specific tracks Honors designation requires a letter of recommendation from the evaluator</p>
	<p>Can add Honors with Distinction in one or more subject areas by going beyond the basic Honors Diploma requirements</p>	<p>Academic Distinction Diploma Not as rigorous as an Honors Program Requires a letter of recommendation</p>
	<p>Has a VoTech and Business Specialization available</p>	<p>Has options for Leadership/Service Diploma, Fine Arts Diploma, and Vocational Honors Diploma, all of which have requirements for letters of recommendation. See MSDHA for requirements.</p>

**Each Program has its own rules about when to apply and what is required for each diploma they offer.**

Curricular Choices

There are TONS of options for curriculum! Check out all the regular avenues to find things that will work best for your student. We generally discuss these things during our year-end evaluation appointment.

## Diplomas and Diploma Programs

Every student, regardless of whether you choose to use a diploma program, needs a high school diploma! Unfortunately, there is still a stigma attached to the GED, but if you do not provide a diploma (and keep a transcript) for your student, you are consigning him or her to needing to pursue a GED at some point in their future.

<http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Home%20Education%20and%20Private%20Tutoring/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1>

From this page, scroll down to grab the Parent-Issued Diploma, which is to be signed by your evaluator. Also download a copy of the Home Education and Private Tutoring booklet, which includes all the changes to the law.

## Support Groups and Diploma Granting Entities

<http://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/Home%20Education%20and%20Private%20Tutoring/Support%20Groups%20and%20Resources.pdf>

In the above document, you will find all the state-approved Diploma Granting Entities (as of the last printing of the PDE's paper, that is).

As of this summer, I am affiliated with Erie County <http://www.echsdiploa.org/diploma.html> and Mason-Dixon <http://www.mdhsa-pa.org/diploma-program/>. Each offers a variety of options for your student. There are other diploma-granting agencies that homeschoolers may utilize which may better suit your student's needs. Neither of these options REQUIRE you to enroll in their program prior to senior year, but there are a couple of options that Mason-Dixon offers where they would PREFER you to enroll in as early as possible.

With homeschooling, you pay for all the expenses. This includes the diploma and everything involved with graduation. Living in PA, there is only one free (for the price of paper and ink) option—the State Diploma. If you go with a Diploma Program, there is no way to get around the fees involved. Even if you do not use one of these options, you might choose to provide your son or daughter with a nicer looking diploma than the standard state version. HSLDA carries them.

<https://www.hslida.org/highschool/diploma.asp> The reason HSLDA offers them is that only Pennsylvania has this diploma program thing. In every other state, parents routinely issue their own diploma and their children go into adulthood, including college, just fine! Here's another place that provides them.

<https://www.homeschooldiploma.com/> These people also have the cap, gown, and tassel. You will want these items for the graduation ceremony, which can be anything you want. You can choose to join the CHAP ceremony, a local homeschool support group's ceremony, or forego a ceremony and simply do something more intimate at home by inviting family and friends to celebrate with your graduate.

## Graduation

Join a local support group to find out about what is available each year if you want to be involved in a group-effort graduation ceremony. Some years, there just isn't anyone graduating. In that case, you will have to do it yourself. Ideas abound; so let the day reflect your child's individuality!

## Records: Transcripts and Keeping Track of Credits

While your evaluator will likely keep a running list of the courses your high schooler has completed and a list of proposed options for each upcoming year, it is your responsibility to keep track of your student's records. The transcript is what backs up the diploma. How you keep track of credits is what backs up the transcript. Whether or not your child goes on to college, you will want to keep a record of what they have done throughout their high school years. This can be as simple as a spreadsheet listing the courses taken each year (see the PDE booklet for a sample of this format). You can also create a file folder and keep a sheet of paper for each course taken complete with what the student used to complete that course. This kind of format can be digital or hard copy. If digital, make a back-up someplace!

You can count credits in several ways but there are a few things to define before beginning:

- High school credits differ from college credits. In high school, one credit = one course; whereas, in college, courses vary by credit weight, which is usually connected to the hours per week the class meets. In college, lab sciences are usually worth 4 credits, while regular classes are often 3 credits. In high school, they are just one credit each.
- If your high schooler takes any college classes as a dual-enrollment student, you will count each college class as ONE high school credit even though he or she may have earned more college credits for that same class.
- A college class (which typically is only one semester long) counts as one year's worth of high school credit. Thus, if you need a credit for something and time is running short, look to a community college to satisfy the high school credit. There are limitations to dual enrollment. The college doesn't HAVE to let your student take the class. Also, you pay for this, although usually it is at a reduced rate.

Now that the terms are defined, there are a variety of ways you can "count" each credit. Diploma programs differ slightly on how they define each credit.

Mason-Dixon specifies that credits are to be counted in the following manner:

- Completion of at least two-thirds of a textbook. One-third of a textbook counts as one half of a unit of credit.
- One hundred twenty daily logged entries of study or activities related to the course content.
- Logged entries describing at least 120 hours of study and/or activities related to the course content. Note: Logged Entries and hours are not interchangeable.
- Completion of a substantial research paper or research project using a minimum of three non-encyclopedic resources, including at least two non-internet resources. Completion of a college course, by correspondence, on the Internet, or on campus.
- Passing test score on an Advanced Placement (AP) or College Level Examination Program Exam (CLEP) or other specific college course exam.
- Participation in an apprenticeship or on-the-job training program.
- Completing a public or private high school course.
- Any other evidence of completion of a course, at the discretion of the evaluator.

Erie specifies their credits in the following manner, but they have additional requirements that you need to be aware of as you “count” things for your student, which are listed on their website and in their guidebook:

Any one of the following alternatives will be accepted as evidence of completion of one year of credit for courses in other subject areas (excluding mathematics).

1. Completion of over three-fourths of a textbook

\*\* Programs such as ACE, which have clearly defined numbers of paces, are excluded from this alternative and must be completed in their entirety. In addition, for any course which uses more than one textbook to equal one credit or specifically states that a certain text is a one-half credit course, the student must complete the course as designed by the provider, using the number of textbooks specified.

2. Logged entries describing at least 120 hours of study and/or activities related to the course content.

3. Completion of a research paper.

\*\* The paper must be at least ten pages in length (typed double-spaced or handwritten single-spaced), use at least three non-encyclopedic references, demonstrate learning of a subject, and include the student’s own conclusions based upon his research. There must be a thesis statement in the introduction which will be followed through to the conclusion. A standard format must be used, correctly citing quotes and including a bibliography.

4. Presentation of a speech of at least thirty minutes duration.

\*\* The speech, presented to a group outside of the immediate family, should demonstrate an understanding of the subject and conclusions drawn by the student from his study.

5. Completion of a college course.

6. Passing test score on an Advance Placement exam (i.e. three points out of the possible five).

As discussed on the previous page, you can use several methods to keep track of these things. Before you do anything, take the time to peruse the various diploma program guidelines, not just the two programs I currently evaluate for, and see if they MIGHT be something you will want for your child. If so, you will need to structure the student’s high school experience to meet those requirements. Actually, it is usually far better to make a list of possible colleges your student MIGHT want to apply to and look at what they require for their incoming freshmen because meeting those objectives is far a better plan! To put it another way, meeting the admissions guidelines for any college will surpass any high school graduation requirements imposed by the state or a general diploma program. While you might need to structure some coursework to meet some of the more rigorous or specialized diploma options, you can be sure that they will not be too far off what colleges expect of students.

Another thing to consider before beginning to keep track of credits is whether you plan to tack hours, logged entries, or days. If you simply plan to expect that the majority of a textbook be completed, that’s pretty easy to keep track of and you don’t really have to do anything more. The other options lead to more documentation, but that isn’t a bad thing—just different! Planning for meeting those other options at the onset will save you an unnecessary headache later. Take a look at the three articles written by respected home school advocate, Inge Cannon: <http://homeschooltranscripts.com/> (scroll down to download each article).

Additionally, Inge used to offer something called CreditPro, which was essentially a bunch of 4x6 index cards where you could list the information that related to a particular course your child was taking. It was great for those people who prefer a subject-oriented transcript as opposed to a traditional transcript organized by school term. You can recreate her now out-of-print product on plain index cards and keep them safe someplace until you are ready to craft a transcript. On the front of the card, you would list how the subject or course name, a description of the project or objectives, the final grade, when the project was completed, and how long it took the student to complete. The other side of the card would be where you would list the dates and times when the student worked on the project. One course might consist of several cards. For example, you might want the student to complete certain chapters of a particular book (not necessarily a text book) then write a report about what they learned. That would go on one project card. Another card might have to do with building a “thing” related to the subject matter. Another old-school homeschool leader, Barb Shelton, has wonderful information and insight on crafting non-traditional course work in her book, *Senior High: A Home Designed Form-U-La*. You can preview some of her ideas on her website: <http://www.homeschoolosis.com/>.

Most diploma programs have a specific template they want you to use for your transcript since it becomes an official part of the student’s diploma documentation. You can keep track of the transcript on your computer each year by saving copies of the document as it undergoes its various stages. Your evaluator won’t know which you are using unless you tell her so she likely won’t have your student’s information organized into transcript format. Most evaluators charge extra for this service, so ask around if you don’t feel confident enough to do it yourself. It’s not hard though!

Deciding whether the subject oriented or traditional format is pretty easy as well. If your student follows a traditional program, you can use the traditional yearly format. If your student has anything specialized, or might want to take advantage of a fifth year of high school, or you are a unit study family, then the subject oriented format is just the ticket for you. I have provided snapshots of both types here:

Once you decide on a format, it’s just a matter of keeping the record up-to-date with information each term. Whatever you do, remember to make back-ups! You never know when a computer might crash and nobody wants to rely on memory to recreate a transcript.

### College

This may or not be in your student’s best interest. Only you and your student can decide this. Your real goal—no matter how you folks have pursued education—is to work yourself out of a job and have your child take their place in society as a functioning and contributing adult. That’s what all parents want for their children. College may or may not be something your child needs. Before you either eliminate it or embrace it, give it serious thought. College carries incredible monetary repercussions. Is college worth it? Only you and your student can be the judge of that. Here are a few book titles that might offer some insight into whether college is for you or not: *The Uncollege Alternative* (Danielle Wood), *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* (Grace Llewelyn), and *The Question is College* (Herbert Kohl).

Let’s say for now that college is in your student’s future. How do you get into college? What is involved with planning for college? We’re not going to talk about alternatives to college beyond the fact that they do exist. The first thing to do is figure out where to apply. Although you can probably use a common application process, you will want to narrow down the choices. Once your child takes one of the high-stakes tests (PSAT, SAT, or ACT), you will be inundated with mail! Make piles of this

information. Places you wouldn't consider at all should go right in the trash. For the ones you might like, head over to their websites to see if they look like places that should be given a closer look. If they aren't, that's fine. You can keep their info in the "maybe" pile. You should think about visiting the ones whose info and website look interesting. If they are far away, you can try to schedule a virtual tour. If they are close enough to visit, a visit is worthwhile so you can get a feel for whether they are a good fit. Your student needs to be an integral part of this part of the search! It isn't enough for the student to simply want to go someplace. You both have to discuss it and come to some agreement since formidable family funds are involved in the decision. The ideal time for all of this college visitation is Junior year. If you opt for a 5<sup>th</sup> year of high school, this time doesn't go to waste. The 5<sup>th</sup> year is sort of like a deferment. It serves to help your student mature before heading off to college. In most instances, you can make that decision later.

There are tons of things to do when getting ready for college, but most of these things fall due throughout the junior and early part of the senior years. You or your student (preferably both of you) need to keep on top of these deadlines. This can come as sort of a rude awakening to the homeschooler who has never had to deal with due dates before. After all, when the due date for something is just something rather arbitrarily set by Mom, it's no wonder that most homeschoolers have a hard time learning that in the real world, due dates mean business. For example, there will be dates that various things must be completed, such as the FAFSA (the financial aid "gatekeeper" paperwork), the various testing dates, application dates, and dates dealing with when your money has to be in to the school of choice. Make your life easier by keeping track of all of these dates somehow.

Of course, you can't wake up on the first day of Junior year and expect all of this to miraculously be in place. You have to prepare for these things. For the most part, that preparation will take place in the middle and early high school years. Ensuring that your student has the prerequisites in place before the crucial junior year will go a long way toward smoothing this difficult time. Some things your student must learn are time management, how to write, study skills, and test taking strategies. They need to be able to take hold of a task and bring it to completion. Even though all of these things are not really "courses" but must instead be acquired in addition to managing their core academics, they can certainly "count" on the transcript in some fashion. During these years, high schoolers should also be taking more and more hold of their education, further refining their direction so that they eventually end up where they want to be! Ideally, the courses taken during the high school years should work to develop the student into the kind of person who could take an entry level position or apprenticeship in the desired field. Career planning is something worth pursuing, as well. Mom and Dad, remember that the goal is to work yourself out of a job by producing a self-sufficient adult who takes their place in society!

As you seek to navigate the waters of high school education, know that there are many who have gone before you who can assist you with ideas to help ease the passage and avoid the pitfalls, but the ultimate journey is going to be as unique as your child. This is as it should be. There are enough similarities among the various options that you can feel fairly confident, but there is enough distinctiveness along each path to make for an exhilarating experience too. Here are a few other book titles that I found helpful when my own sons were in high school: *College Without Compromise* (Scott and Kris Wightman), *Homeschoolers' College Admissions Handbook* (Cafi Cohen), *Accelerated Distance Learning* (Brad Voeller), *Homeschooling the High Schooler* (Diana McAlister and Candice Childs), and *The High School Handbook* (Mary Scofield). I'm sure there are many more titles available today.