

## Homeschooling in High School

By David P. Byers Ph.D.

*An Excerpt from Homeschooling in High School for Higher Education by David P. Byers Ph.D.*

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I recently reviewed some of the statistics about homeschooling that are provided by the Nebraska Department of Education, which indicated that there was a 3% drop in the number of homeschoolers for the 2003/2004 school year. The data provided by the state has always indicated significant drops in the number of homeschooled children after age 13—between grades 8 and 10—particular by age 15, but this year there was a 3% drop in the overall number of children being taught at home.

I wonder what the data will reflect when the new requirement mandating school attendance up to age 18 goes into effect. I'd almost be willing to bet that the numbers will drop again before they eventually stabilize, primarily because parents may be concerned about teaching their children at home through high school.

There may be any number of reasons why parents or children decide to stop homeschooling for high school. The lure of social activities, competitive sports, scholarship opportunities, and preparation for college are just some of the reasons.

Another valid reason may be that some parents and children are burned out on homeschooling. If they have homeschooled for any length of time, they simply may have had enough!

Yet, I think another major reason for not homeschooling through high school is one that stands alone, but one that may also be behind many of the other reasons—fear! Let's face it, teaching high school can be intimidating and overwhelming especially if you don't consider yourself qualified to teach certain subjects.

Over the years when we've been asked if we were going to continue to teach our children through high school, my response has always been, "As long as I feel like we are doing well by our children, then by all means, yes!" Our oldest child will be a junior next year and the next child in line will be a sophomore. As of right now, we are committed to going all the way through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade at home with those two and the next four as well.

Yes, by teaching our children at home there are things that they (and we) are giving up. They won't go to prom or homecoming, they won't be in a state-level football or volleyball game, and they won't have the benefit of an academic counselor to help them track down scholarships. However, they do enjoy activities such as the recently held spring formal that my wife and daughter found extremely enjoyable. They also are in competitive flag football,

gym class, bowling, and many other wonderful activities that so many dedicated homeschooling parents help make possible and that provide opportunities for being social.

Our children also enjoy the safety and security of a loving home and the companionship and admiration of their younger siblings. Being taught at home has enabled all of them to be closer to one another than would be possible if they were apart 6-8 hours a day going to school outside the home.

As far as academics go, I would dare say that our children will be as prepared for college and for life as many of their traditionally schooled counterparts, if not more so. Has it been easy? No. Fortunately, my wife and I have different strengths when it comes to math, science, and all the other subjects so we have most of the bases covered. When it comes to time for trigonometry or calculus, it may be a different story!

High school at home doesn't have to be a time of trepidation for parents or their children. There are so many wonderful resources that can help parents develop and/or supplement their curricula, especially in the areas in which they feel that they are lacking skills or knowledge. From traditional homeschool materials such as A Beka or BJU to consultants to community college courses, homeschool parents have a plethora of options to help them with their high school programs.

You know, it's just a hunch, but I think that another one of the reasons why parents may decide not to teach their children at home through high school is because they don't realize that they don't have to do things the same way as they did when their children were in grade school. When children are in grade school, they often need us to teach them directly. In essence, we are the subject matter experts who control so much of our children's learning experiences, which is often a good thing and it's always normal.

When our children are in grade school, as teachers, we also feel more comfortable with teaching math through multiplication and long division, teaching science through the earth sciences level, with teaching basic reading and writing skills, and with teaching U.S. history. Most parents figure that they can't mess up those subjects too much at the grade school level!

Having our children feel like we are the experts at something is fun too. When our children become teenagers, that feeling often goes away for them and for us—it doesn't matter if you homeschool or not!

But despair not. Our children usually look to us again for our expertise, only later in life. One of my favorite quotes comes from Mark Twain and goes something like this, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so

ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.”

The truth is that when our children hit high school, we may lose confidence in our abilities to teach certain subjects. We don't want to look like we don't know what we are doing or that we don't know the answers. And, we certainly don't want to “mess things up” for our children who soon will be going off to college or joining the adult world in some other manner.

What we teach our children in high school is regulated in part by the state, but is primarily driven by the knowledge and skills that colleges and universities want incoming students to have. For instance, many schools want students to have so many years of foreign language and mathematics. For parents, these subjects may be the hardest, but through a variety of resources including community college courses, students can obtain the necessary credits. In fact, the new law mandating school attendance to age 18 simply gives homeschooled students more time to take more classes.

Remember, there is no rule stating that math and languages have to be taught during the freshman and sophomore years of high school. You can get a whole lot of credits out of the way during those first two years based on what you feel comfortable to teach and leave other subjects to be learned for the last two years of high school when your child is old enough and ready enough to take courses at Metro! Or, you can use computer programs, textbooks, video courses, consultants, co-op schools, or other resources to help you teach your child effectively through high school.

Actually, letting go of some of the responsibility for teaching when our children are in high school is a good thing as it helps our children develop the critical thinking and self-directed learning skills that are essential for college and for life. When our children go to college, their professors are more guides or facilitators than teachers in the traditional sense, so helping your high school children experience this approach with you acting as the guide is a wonderful teaching opportunity in itself.

Now, don't get me wrong, college professors do teach specific information and skills, but their primary job is to teach their students how to learn by teaching them how to think! That may sound like double-talk, but it really isn't.

It's a professor's job to help students look at life in different ways by challenging their perceptions of the world around them. Students learn about how others view the world, which in turn helps the students learn more about themselves and the way they themselves think—this is called metacognition or thinking about thinking.

In any college course, professors can teach their students only so much due to time limits and the constraints of the program. What they hope will happen is that their students will become motivated to learn more on their own; in college, students spend a great deal of time learning on their own by conducting research or experiments, being involved in study groups, and through lots of reading and writing.

You can probably already see where I'm going with this. High school is a great time to help children develop these skills; with the freedom to develop a format that works best for your child, high school at home is an even better opportunity to develop college-level, self-directed learning skills.

High school can even be fun for you and your children because you can set up your curricula so that your child can identify and explore topics they enjoy to a greater depth than they could in other school settings. In short, high school at home doesn't have to be drudgery for children or a time of doubt for parents. It is really a wonderful opportunity to take your homeschool program and the relationship with your children to new heights!

Homeschooling through high school is a perfect opportunity for parents to continue to teach the values they want their children to have; those values cannot be taught anywhere else. Homeschooling through high school is the best chance the parents have to role model what it means to be an adult and to live out the values they've been teaching their children all along before their children go full force into college or other places in the world that will challenge how they think and what they believe.

One final thought: Despite the fact that the resources to do so are available, homeschooling through high school isn't for everyone. Parents cannot continue to teach their children at home if the circumstances don't permit it or the desire to do so just is not present. God guides parents to be able to do what is best for their families according to His will. If homeschooling through high school is your desire, may God grant you the serenity to determine His will and the means to carry it out.

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