

GUIDE TO PA HOMESCHOOLERS DIPLOMA

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Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency

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I. Background

Sometimes you don't know what you have until someone tries to take it away. That's the way it was in November 1988 when the opponents of home education tried to take the requirements for graduation out of the Pennsylvania home education bill, which was very close to passage. Were they trying to make things easier for homeschoolers by eliminating requirements? I think not.

Many homeschoolers think of requirements in a negative way. But graduation requirements have a positive side to them. They mean that homeschooled students can get high school diplomas that are recognized as legal in Pennsylvania.

With all of the cheating in the schools, with all of the drugs, with all of the teen-age pregnancies, with all of the violence, why do parents send their children to the schools? The answer is partly that piece of paper called a high school diploma which is the passport to jobs and college and success in life. Pennsylvania is the only state with a state law which also recognizes graduation for homeschoolers. The only trouble was that our law didn't specify *who* gives the diplomas.

From the time that the homeschool bill was enacted as Act 169 in December 1988, until September 1990, we tried to pin down the PA Department of Education about who should award diplomas to students who meet the graduation requirements that are specified in the law. Until then, all of their answers had been negative. They specified who wouldn't give the diplomas, but they never said who should. For example, in a March 1989 Basic Education Circular they told the school districts that local districts did not have to issue diplomas to home education graduates, or in any way recognize that requirements for graduation had been met.

So, on September 24, 1990, after consulting with about 70 homeschooling leaders from all across the state, I wrote a letter to the Department asking them to award the diplomas themselves, based upon the signatures of the parents and evaluators on a transcript form. My intention was to get them to "fish or cut bait." Either they would award the diplomas themselves or specify who should.

On October 2, 1990, Dr. Phillip Mulvihill, the new Chief of the Division of Advisory Services at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, wrote me that it would not be appropriate for the Department of Education to award diplomas since homeschooling is private education. He wrote, "It is not clear to me how the government could issue a credential for an educational program that was intentionally removed from government control." Instead, he recommended that the diplomas be issued by a homeschoolers organization. He concluded:

It seems more appropriate to me to have the credential for home schoolers issued by a home schoolers organization. The monitoring and evaluation could then be done by individuals familiar with these programs and the quality control could be enforced by those individuals who have a vested interest in maintaining that quality.

Based on this advice, we decided to issue a diploma through Pennsylvania Homeschoolers. Our diplomas were first put to test when our graduates first applied for state grants for college through PHEAA (the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency) in the Spring of 1992.

At first PHEAA was reluctant to award grants to home education graduates. For PHEAA to give a grant to a student, Pennsylvania law requires that the student must have a diploma which, in the opinion of the PA Department of Education, is the equivalent of a Pennsylvania public school diploma. PHEAA and the Department of Education have interpreted this language to include all students who are graduates of non-public schools in Pennsylvania, as well as students who are graduates of foreign high schools. However, graduates of correspondence schools or private tutoring must first pass the GED before the Department of Education deems them to have the equivalent of a high school diploma.

On June 11, 1992, Joseph Bard, Commissioner for Elementary and Secondary Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, wrote a letter to the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), the state agency that oversees grants and loans. Mr. Bard wrote:

The question of eligibility for PHEAA grants and loans by Pennsylvania students receiving their education through Home Education Programs has been posed by Dr. Howard B. Richman, Pennsylvania Homeschoolers.

Home Education in Pennsylvania is addressed in Section 1327.1 (Act 169 of 1988) of the Public School Code of 1949. The code prescribes attendance and curriculum requirements that mirror those of the public school system. In addition, the code requires the program supervisor to maintain specific documentation to demonstrate that appropriate education is occurring. This documentation is annually submitted to the superintendent of the public school district of residence as monitor of the program.

Dr. Richman, founder of the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers organization, has furnished the Department of Education the standards and procedures established by the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers for evaluation of a home education student's education portfolio. The Department has been asked to review those standards and procedures to render an opinion as to the acceptability of these student's credentials for PHEAA grants and loans.

We have reviewed the standards and procedures of the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency and find them acceptable, therefore, I request PHEAA consider any student receiving a diploma from the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency as eligible for a PHEAA grant and loan.

In his reply, Gary Smith at PHEAA responded:

Specifically, at issue is the provision in the State Grant statute that requires the Department to make a determination whether a school "...provides a course of instruction...and maintains standards of instruction substantially equivalent to those of the public high schools located in the Commonwealth."

Your letter indicates that the Pennsylvania Department of Education has reviewed the standards and procedures of the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency and finds them acceptable. Therefore, effective with the 1992-93 academic year the Agency will now accept a Pennsylvania Homeschoolers diploma as satisfaction of the Agency's high school graduation test for State Grant purposes.

With these letters, Pennsylvania became the first state in the country where you can graduate from high school as a homeschooled student and have your diploma recognized.

PHAA's recognition was soon put into regulation by the State Board of Education. PHAA was recognized as a home schooling accreditation agency, recognized to accredit home schooling diplomas by 22 Pa Code § 121.21 which states:

(c) For purposes of the State Higher Education Grant Program, an approved secondary school shall also include any home education program that is accredited by any home schooling accreditation agency approved by the Department of Education. If the home education program lacks the requisite accreditation, certification by the appropriate local school official attesting that the home education program is in compliance with section 1327.1 of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § 13-1327.1) shall be submitted to the Agency by the appropriate local school official.

In October 2014, Act 196 of 2014 passed and was signed by Governor Corbett. While recognizing diplomas awarded by parents and signed by the senior year evaluator on a PA Department of Education diploma form, that bill also put into statute the Department of Education's policy of recognizing diplomas awarded by diploma-granting organizations.

A [list of all of the organizations](#) recognized to give diplomas to home school graduates and an application for recognition can be found on the PA Department of Education's website. PHAA is the only accreditation agency on the current list.

In sum, what began as PA Department of Education policy has been reinforced by regulation and statute. The diplomas awarded by PHAA to graduates of Pennsylvania home education programs are not only recognized, they are also accredited.

Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency

PHAA was incorporated as a non-profit corporation on January 1, 1996, in order to accredit the diplomas of Pennsylvania home education graduates. At the annual membership meetings, which takes place over Zoom at PHAA's virtual conference) members elect the Board of

Directors who in turn elect the officers. When changes in [PHAA's bylaws](#) are proposed at a membership meeting they are voted on through a written ballot in the fall issue of the PHAA *Excelsior* newsletter which is published online. Members get notified by email and are given the password whenever a new issue of *The Excelsior*, our quarterly online student newsletter, is published.

PHAA also holds two graduation ceremonies each year, one in Eastern and the other in Western PA. In 2020, we had a virtual graduation ceremony due to the COVID-19 epidemic. That ceremony can be watched online on [YouTube](#).

The PHAA Difference

What really makes PHAA unique is our high standards-- we believe in excellence and do our best to attain it. For example, in 2009 our members voted to change the PHAA bylaws in order to require that evaluation letters be substantive narratives.

Our membership wanted to keep PHAA from being harmed by a trend within the homeschooling community in which evaluators have extremely brief meetings with the family being evaluated and then issue only identical form-letter evaluations. The evaluator hastily goes through the portfolio, often telling the family that they have too many sample papers included. Afterwards the evaluator gives the family a form letter identical to every other one, simply stating the very minimum required by law. Instead of telling the world about high-quality work, service activities, or individual initiative demonstrated by the student, they sign an identical letter that could fit any student.

In contrast, most PHAA evaluation letters create pictures of what the students did during the year, and of the students themselves. They tell about excellence encountered in the home education programs. These letters translate easily into college recommendation letters, allowing evaluators to fulfill the role of guidance counselor or academic reference in students' applications.

Although some diploma programs only send out the transcript of grades and credits to colleges, PHAA has always considered the transcript to just be a summary of the evaluation letters. We attach all of the evaluation letters, 9th through 12th, to each transcript. As a result, the transcript is basically a summary of the much more detailed evaluation letters. Those evaluation letters often function as recommendations of the particular students.

There are several other homeschool organizations that are also recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to award diplomas to graduates of PA home education programs. We serve those homeschoolers who want to tell the world about the excellence of their programs. Our slogan is, "Encourage Excellence."

How well do PHAA Students Score?

The College Board reports that 128 of our class of 2009 PHAA students took the SAT exam. Their average scores were 602 on the Critical Reading section and 560 on the Math section, and 572 on the Writing section. The national average for all college-bound seniors was about 500 on each section. Our scores have continued at about those levels.

II. Principles and Requirements

One joke asks, “What is the difference between someone who is illiterate and someone who is functionally illiterate?” The answer, “The functional illiterate has a high school diploma.” When putting together the initial requirements for PHAA’s diploma, we tried to design requirements that would insure that the same thing could not be said of our graduates.

PHAA’s standards are based upon seven principles:

1. *Homeschool graduates should be literate.* They should be able to read, write, and speak well. I expect that over time employers and colleges will recognize that homeschool graduates are not only trustworthy and honest, but have strong communication skills.

2. *Requirements should be construed in flexible ways.* Homeschoolers are round pegs and graduation requirements are square holes. Our idea was to make the square holes flexible enough so that they could fit round pegs. For example, people will have a choice on whether to use textbooks or not, on whether a course consists mostly of study or mostly of real-life activities, and on whether to teach a half-year course in a half-year block or spread it out throughout the school year.

3. *Homeschooling Families Can be Trusted.* Homeschooling families can be trusted to do meaningful activities to fulfill reasonable requirements.

4. *Outside Structure Can be Helpful.* There is usually a certain amount of power sharing between parents and teenagers, and it is not always easy for parents to get their teenagers to do reading, writing, or a particular subject area (depending upon the student). With PHAA requirements, the parents can be on their teenager’s side helping them to do the required work, but not have to be the ‘heavy’ who makes the requirements.

5. *Requirements Should be Clear.* We tried to specify the minimum requirements so clearly that students can know exactly what they have to do in order to meet them.

6. *Diplomas Mean More if Someone Outside the Family is Involved.* Since Pennsylvania families must already have evaluators certify each year that they are giving the student an appropriate education, it is natural for the evaluator to sign the transcripts and diplomas along with the supervisor of the home education program (i.e. parent).

7. *Graduates are not Drop Outs.* Since PHAA’s diploma is based upon meeting the requirements of Act 169 of 1988, it cannot award diplomas to people who “drop out” from complying with the home education law. Also, we don’t want PHAA graduates to be perceived as “drop outs” by the school superintendents and the general community. So, on the transcript form, the supervisor of the home education program will have to sign this statement: “I certify that this student met all of the requirements for graduation from a home education program as specified by Act 169 of 1988, and that the home education program was in full compliance with Pennsylvania law at the time of graduation.” This means that the supervisor filed an affidavit with the local school district at the beginning, or during, the senior year and will turn in a portfolio at the end

of the senior year. Parents who want their children to “drop out” from complying with the home education law once their children pass the compulsory school age should choose another diploma option.

What PHAA Offers

PHAA offers a numbered diploma (including an embossed seal) which is signed by the senior year evaluator of the home education program, the supervisor of the home education program, and the Executive Director of PHAA. Also, PHAA keeps transcripts on file with attached evaluation letters from each high school year and sends out transcripts with a cover letter and evaluation letters attached upon receipt of a request from the snail mail or online request from the parent or student.

PHAA stands behind its diplomas

1. PHAA collects statistics on its graduates which can be made available to prospective employers and colleges.

2. PHAA intervenes by phone call or letter whenever it is informed about a high school, college, or employer is not recognizing PHAA diplomas or transcripts-- most of these cases are solved very quickly as info is provided on PHAA.

3. PHAA organizes two graduation ceremonies in Pennsylvania each June, one in Western PA and one in Eastern PA, making it convenient for families to attend.

PHAA charges the following fees

1. \$45 filing fee, payable when joining PHAA for a homeschooled high school student. Accompany the fee with the *Filing Form* (on page 30 and in the [PHAA online store](#)). The fee is doubled if paid after June 30th at the end of the senior year and is no longer accepted after July 31 at the end of the senior year.

2. \$55 diploma fee, should be paid after all senior year work is completed. Accompany the fee with the Diploma Request Form (on page 31 and in the [PHAA online store](#)). This fee doubles if paid after July 31st at the end of the senior year and is no longer accepted after August 31 at the end of the senior year.

3. \$10 transcript fee whenever the request for a transcript is made through snail mail. Accompany the fee with the Transcript Request Form (on page 32).

4. \$15 rushed transcript fee paid online in the [PHAA Store](#) using Paypal or a credit card. The store also has options for emailing transcripts or posting them to the NCAA or the Common App. (Normally, the Common App transcript for current students can be posted by evaluators, with PHAA only needed in order to post the final transcript of a graduate.)

Requirements for Graduation

The *Graduation Checklist* on page 29 shows the course requirements for graduation in a nutshell. You might want to make a copy for your high school age son or daughter and check off what has already been accomplished.

In order to graduate from a home education program, a student must complete all of the courses that are required by Pennsylvania law during high school (grades 9 through 12).

These requirements are:

- Four years of English
- Three years of mathematics
- Three years of science
- Three years of social studies
- Two years of arts and humanities

The requirement for four years of English indicates that four years must be spent at the high school level (grades 9 through 12) in order for the student to graduate. **This means that students cannot graduate in less than 4 years.** High school students may participate in vocational programs where they spend part-time doing academics and part-time working on vocational activities. Students may also begin taking college courses while still in high school, and a few even go ‘early admission’ to college full time after 10th or 11th grade-- PHAA issues the diploma after what would have been the senior year of high school.

Since four years are not required for other subjects, it will not be necessary for the student to take a course in every subject area each year. Public school students are also required to take $\frac{1}{4}$ of a year of physical education each year during high school in order to graduate, while home education programs have no physical education requirement during high school. We certainly highly recommend a good fitness program as an elective throughout high school, and this can be critical if a student transfers to a public school.

The home education law specifies further course requirements for the secondary level (grades 7 to 12). Therefore, whichever of these courses were *not* taken during 7th or 8th grade, *must* be taken during high school. PHAA’s interpretation is that at least $\frac{1}{2}$ year of each of these subjects must be taken some time within grades 7 to 12: (1) Geography, (2) Civics, (3) World history, (4) History of the U. S. and Pennsylvania, (5) General mathematics, (6) Algebra, (7) Geometry, (8) Safety education including fire safety, (9) Health and physiology, (10) Physical education, (11) Music, and (12) Art.

Completing a Year’s Work

To comply with the Pennsylvania home education law, you must get your home education program evaluated at the end of each year. Your PHAA evaluator will check to see if you have met at least the minimum requirements for the courses that you have completed. *Many students go far beyond these minimums.*

The *Year’s Work Checklist* on page 28 will help you determine whether you have met the requirements for credit for each course taken. You can use this check list to note your progress and share it with your evaluator when you meet for the evaluation.

English Courses

According to Pennsylvania’s home education law, the following areas are included in the secondary English course requirement: literature, composition, language, and speech. In order to insure that its graduates are fully literate, PHAA requires that each of these areas be incorporated into each high school English course. Many students integrate these English requirements into work in other subject areas. For example, the literature requirement could involve

reading biographies that are part of history work, the composition requirement could include writing a science paper, and the speech requirement could be met by a talk on a religious topic for a humanities course.

In order to complete the minimum requirement for English, a student must meet *all* of the following each year:

1. Literature. Student will read at least twenty-five books in any subject area, fiction or non-fiction, including three literary classics. A list of titles of books read, including at least twenty-five titles, will demonstrate that a student has met this requirement. A literature anthology textbook or ten books of the Bible can be substituted for 10 of the required books. At the discretion of the evaluator the quality and length of books read can be taken into consideration in order to accept credit for a student who has not met the quantity requirement. (See page 10 for more information.)

2. Composition. In order to meet the composition requirement, the student will write one long composition at least 2500 words long and at least 3 other compositions. We do not have a formal length requirement for the shorter papers, but a good rule of thumb would be around 500 words minimum. At the discretion of the evaluator, other combinations of essays of similar total length may be accepted. We recommend aiming for a variety in types of writing.

3. Language Study. In order to meet the language study requirement, rough drafts which show that punctuation, usage, and/or grammatical errors were corrected in the process of writing these compositions will be accepted. Alternatively, the language requirement can be met through completion of over $\frac{1}{4}$ of a language or grammar textbook or at least 45 daily logged entries of work in language, vocabulary, or grammar study.

4. Speech. Student must give at least one speech during the year to a group outside of the immediate family. The speech may be delivered in English or in American Sign Language. Any one of the following will be accepted as proof that the student met this requirement: (a) a photo showing the student giving the speech, (b) notes or draft which the student used when giving or preparing the speech, (c) a program from the event where the speech was given, (d) recognition from the organizers of the event where the speech was given, (e) a description of the event and speech, written by the student or parent, (f) any other evidence that a speech was given may be accepted at the discretion of the evaluator. (See page 11 for more information.)

There is an alternative way to meet PHAA’s English requirement for a particular year. It can be satisfied by successful completion of the required speech and two English college courses within the same school year or successful completion of the required speech and any AP English class whose syllabus has been approved by the College Board’s audit procedure.

Subject Areas Other than English

Any *one* of the following alternatives will be accepted as evidence of completion of one year of credit for courses

in other subject areas. Many students use a combination:

1. Completion of over two-thirds of a textbook. (one-third to two-thirds of a textbook counts as $\frac{1}{2}$ year of credit.) Students using this option should be prepared to show their evaluator *written evidence* such as notes, chapter summaries, essays related to their readings, and/or answers to questions posed in the text. Do not just say, "I read the textbook."

2. At least 120 daily logged entries of study and/or activities related to the course content. These logged entries should be more than a simple check of subject and should include brief descriptive notations. (60 to 119 entries = $\frac{1}{2}$ year of credit.)

3. Logged entries describing at least 120 hours of study and/or activities related to the course content. (60 to 119 hours of logged entries = $\frac{1}{2}$ year of credit.)

4. Completion of a research paper of at least 2500 words in length, using at least three non-encyclopedia references, which demonstrates learning of a subject and includes the student's own conclusions based upon his research.

5. Completion of a one semester college course.

6. Completion of an *Advance Placement* (AP) course whose syllabus was approved by the College Board audit process.

7. Completion of preparatory work for a College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exam, AP exam, DANTES Subject Standardized Test (DSST) exam, or similar equivalent exam that is required for college credit, and passed exam.

8. Any other evidence of completion of a course at the discretion of the evaluator. This could include special projects, combinations of parts of the above requirements, distance course work, participation in advanced academic competitions, etc.

Course Titles

Any of these course titles will be acceptable. Others may be acceptable at the discretion of the evaluator. The "AP" titles should only be used when the course syllabus has been authorized through the College Board AP Audit process:

English Courses. English 9, English 10, English 11, English 12, AP English Lang, and AP English Lit.

Mathematics Courses. Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculus, AP Calculus AB, AP Calculus BC. (Although not considered to be "core" courses, the following titles also will be accepted by PHAA evaluators: computer science, consumer mathematics, general mathematics, and statistics.)

Social Studies Courses. American Cultures, Ancient History, Anthropology, Civics, Economics, Geography, History, History of the US and Pennsylvania, Modern History, Pennsylvania History, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, United States history, World Cultures, World History, AP Comp Govt and Pol, AP European History, AP Human Geography, AP Macro Economics, AP Micro Economics, AP Psychology, AP US Govt and Politics, AP US History, AP Wrld History.

(Although not considered to be a "core" course, AP Art History can be accepted by PHAA evaluators as a social studies course.)

Science Courses. Astronomy, Biological Science, Biology (lab), Chemical science, Chemistry (lab), Earth Science, Ecology, Environmental Science, General Science, Geology, Physical science, Physics (lab), AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Environmental Science, AP Physics B, AP Physics C. (Although not considered a "core" course when listed as a science, AP Psychology has sufficient neurology to be accepted by PHAA evaluators as a science course.)

Arts and Humanities Courses. Philosophy, French, French 1, French 2, French 3, French 4, AP French Lang, German, German 1, German 2, German 3, German 4, AP German Lang, Greek, Greek 1, Greek 2, Greek 3, Greek 4, Hebrew, Hebrew 1, Hebrew 2, Hebrew 3, Hebrew 4, Latin, Latin 1, Latin 2, Latin 3, Latin 4, AP Latin Vergil, Spanish, Spanish 1, Spanish 2, Spanish 3, Spanish 4, AP Span Lang, AP Span Lit, American Sign Language, art history, AP art history, Bible, dance, film studies, other foreign languages, music, music history, music theory, practical arts and crafts, theater, theology, and visual arts. Extra English or history courses can also be used to meet the arts and humanities requirement. Many colleges require that their applicants have completed at least two years of the same foreign language.

Other Areas. Courses in other areas are not considered to be "core" courses. These can include such courses as home economics, industrial arts, computer literacy, vocational apprenticeships and work experiences, physical education, health, safety, driver education, and others.

Transfer Credits

PHAA accepts transfer credits from a school (upon receipt of an official school transcript) when the grade awarded was a "C" or better. In order to get a PHAA diploma, transfer students from a school must spend their entire senior year (all 180 days) in a Pennsylvania home education program. If homeschoolers have not kept good documentation in the past before enrollment in PHAA, our evaluators, at their discretion, may choose to accept credits for previous years of homeschooling based upon interviews with the parent and student. Evaluators should be especially liberal in accepting past credits for long-term homeschool students who moved to Pennsylvania from other states. Parents may be required to write up a summary for each course where credit is expected, describing materials and methods used, special accomplishments, etc..

How Credits are Awarded

Supervisor-members (parents) and evaluators award credits by signing their names on the PHAA transcript forms. PHAA, in turn, accepts all credits that are accepted by its evaluator-members. A full list of [PHAA evaluators](#) with email addresses of those seeking more evaluatees can be found on the PHAA website. A listing of PHAA member evaluators, including many phone numbers, appears in *The Excelsior*, PHAA's student newsletter which is published online. (Supervisor-members get notified by email and are given the password whenever a new issue is published.)

Handicapped Provision

It is the intention of PHAA to award diplomas to handicapped home-educated students who are achieving up to their potential. Therefore, any of these requirements may be waived by the evaluator if he deems them inappropriate to a handicapped student, and if the evaluator mentions, in the evaluation letter, that the student is handicapped. If significant adaptations have been made, the term “adapted” should be added to the course on the transcript.

Quality Counts

Parents are urged to set standards of quality for their student’s work in order to make meeting these requirements a meaningful activity. Remember too that PHAA requirements are *minimums*, and that many students go far beyond them as they pursue excellence. In the letters of evaluation which will be attached to the transcripts, evaluators are required to recognize: (1) quality work, (2) service activities, and (3) individual initiative demonstrated by the student.

Subject to Change

These requirements are from the [PHAA Bylaws](#) and can be changed through votes of the membership.

III. Advanced Courses

PHAA Bylaws recognize several types of advanced courses--honors courses, college courses, and Advanced Placement courses-- and handles each in a different way on the PHAA Transcript.

Honors Courses

We hope that the prospect of the “Honors” designation in the course title will give students an extra push of motivation to meet higher standards, do more work, do better quality work, or show more initiative.

When the word “Honors” appears as part of a course title on the transcript, it indicates either: (1) special honors received by the student as part of the course, or (2) great initiative shown by the student as part of the course.

The family can note that a course is an “Honors” course when filling in the course title on the *Year’s Work Checklist* on page 28. Then they can include an attachment to the checklist explaining why they think the course should be listed as an honors course.

If the evaluator agrees that the course deserves the “Honors” designation, he or she will include the word “Honors” in the designation of the course on the transcript. For example, instead of writing “English 9,” the evaluator would call the course “Honors English 9” on the transcript.

The evaluator would also need to describe in the evaluation letter why the course earned the Honors designation. This will communicate with future colleges and competitive summer programs what the honors designation means for this student. That explanation could be any of the following:

- The student did very well in challenging activities such as regional or national competitions related to the course content, showing a readiness to meet high standards.
- The student worked with materials generally considered as “above grade level,” or a curriculum that is especially demanding, or worked through multiple levels of a course.
- The student has done significantly more than most students completing this type of course.
- The student’s work has been of truly exceptional quality. Quality of thought demonstrated should certainly count in judging an honors course, such as depth of thought and ability shown in writing projects, quite beyond what most good students would be doing at this level.
- The student shows special initiative in this course. Look for students developing their own original projects related to course content, demonstrating that they are going beyond just doing their “assigned work” and starting to develop their own research projects that really show deep interest and involvement, not just “following directions.”
- The student did very well on a test, showing that the work was above the normal for a high school course. For example, the student might have passed a CLEP test, indicating that the learning was college-level.

College Board CLEP Tests

One of the most straightforward ways to earn the honors designation would be for the student to take and pass a CLEP test at the end of the course. The student would then not only earn high school credit, but may also earn college credit, depending on college policy.

CLEP tests (College Level Examination Program) were developed by the College Board. This program was originally designed for older adults coming back into college, as a way for them to document that they had covered college-level material on their own through independent study. Now the program is also being promoted to high school students, and a growing number of homeschoolers are taking part very successfully. Some differences between CLEP and AP exams:

- CLEP exams are usually administered monthly at state universities and community colleges--AP exams are given only in two weeks in May each spring, at high schools.
- CLEP exams only involve multiple-choice questions, and you get your scores back immediately-- AP exams all involves essays or ‘free-response questions’, and scores are ready in July after the May testing.
- CLEP exams are a bit less expensive (currently \$77) than AP exams (currently \$84).
- CLEP exams cover a slightly different range of courses.

One possible drawback-- some selective colleges will not give credit or advanced placement for CLEP scores, but will for strong AP scores. Check to see the policy of colleges you are considering. Even if credit is not given, some students have found that colleges appreciate seeing strong CLEP scores-- they are another indication of initiative, strong ability, and objective achievement. See www.collegeboard.com for full info on this alternate route for testing for college credit.

College Courses

Many high school homeschoolers take college courses while in high school, often at local community colleges. PHAA automatically gives high school credit for all college courses that are passed, except that taking a college English course is not a substitute for completing PHAA’s English requirements.

When a college course appears on the transcript, the name of the college is indicated on the transcript, and the grade on the transcript should reflect the grade given by the college. Most evaluators place an asterisk (*) after the name of the course on the transcript. And then put a note at the bottom of the page which states the name of the college where the course was completed.

Advanced Placement Courses

When “AP” or “Advanced Placement” appears as part of a course title on the transcript, it shall indicate that the student has taken the Advanced Placement exam for the test specified by the course title. The Advanced Placement test score should be added to the transcript once it becomes available.

My joke back in 1994 to families I (Susan) evaluated was that if they saw a nice long article on how wonderful it

was for homeschoolers to take Advanced Placement Exams (AP Exams), then they'd know our son Jesse had passed his. If there wasn't an article, he didn't make the grade. Well, the article did appear, and not only did Jesse pass (with flying colors, I might proudly add— receiving the highest score, a 5 on a 1 to 5 scale), but two other homeschoolers that we knew of, Nicole Charles of Holtwood PA and Rachel Johnston of Sewickley PA, also passed AP tests. So we then knew about three homeschoolers who'd taken this step— and by 1998 over 40 AP exams were taken, and by 2009, hundreds.

So what are AP Exams? They are 2-3 hour exams designed for high school students that test the knowledge and analytical skills covered in full-year or half-year college courses. Students can take the exams at any grade in high school— starting in 9th grade if they are prepared—right up to the last semester of 12th grade. If students do well on these exams, they usually get either college credit, the chance to opt out of intro-level core courses, or advanced placement in higher level courses at their chosen college.

AP exams are developed by the College Board, the same organization that offers the SAT and CLEP Exams (College-Level Examination Program), and the program has been in place since 1955. They've been expanding the program steadily, and now offer over 30 different exams (or in the case of studio art, a portfolio assessment). All exams have both a multiple-choice section and a "free-response" section where students either write essays or solve specific problems with a written proof-- back 'free-response' questions are posted on the College Board website as learning tools. There are study guides available from other publishers also that are very helpful. Homeschool parents can devise their own syllabus, following clear AP guidelines, and go through the free AP Audit process to have their syllabus authorized-- this enables the course to be labeled as 'AP' on the PHAA transcript. A student can still take an AP exam, without having the syllabus authorized through the Audit process-- just label the course then as 'HONORS', and when the AP score is known, add that to the transcript.

How do you sign up for these exams and where do you take them? You have to go to a high school that offers the tests and take it there (no "at home" administrations allowed— AP teachers can't even proctor their own students taking the exam!). Finding a test location is generally not too difficult. We recommend a parent first call the local public high school by mid-year, requesting to speak to the AP Coordinator. Schools have been told by the College Board that they can ask for an extra proctoring fee for homeschool students-- most do not require this, but some may for the more unusual exams where your student might be the only one testing. All AP exams are given in the first two weeks of May, on specific dates (each test has a separate time-slot and date, for test security reasons and also so that students can take several exams if they want to). Some families need to contact a wide range of schools before finding one ready to have a homeschool student sit for an exam-- but know that everyone who starts this process in a timely way, and doesn't give up too soon, finds a suitable

location.

For more info on the AP program, including info about specific courses, go to the College Board's website: www.collegeboard.com.

Pennsylvania Homeschoolers AP Online

Beginning with the 1996-1997 school year, Pennsylvania Homeschoolers began to organize Internet classes for homeschoolers who were preparing to take AP Exams. We realized that it was very challenging for many students to keep up the pace needed for success in AP when working independently-- the AP Online class format really helps with this. The latest information about the courses, which are all authorized through the College Board AP Audit program, can be found on the PA Homeschoolers AP Online web site at www.aphomeschoolers.com.

Some of the AP Online teachers present sessions at PHAA's *High School at Home Conference*, giving students a chance to meet the teachers and learn more about the scope and format of the courses.

Once the courses begin in late August or early September, they feature active discussions between students on the course websites and much feedback from the course instructors. Many use multi-media resources online, giving students varied ways to engage with the course content. Students who complete these courses are well-prepared for the exams-- you can read detailed student reviews on the courses up on the website to help you in making decisions about AP Online.

Their scores on AP exams have been very encouraging, with scores in general much higher than those listed by the College Board as national averages. It is of course important for families to view the actual *learning* involved as the real benefit-- a strong score is in a sense a perk that comes from working hard all year long and staying active in the course. There are always a few strong students who are disappointed in their AP scores-- they need to bear in mind that colleges will still view it as very positive that the student prepared for and actually took the exam. The syllabi of the PA Homeschoolers courses have been pre-approved by the College Board making it possible to put the course names on a high school transcript without violating the College Board's trademark.

Many students find that one of the things they value the most in our AP Online courses is the chance to get to know and work with other very bright homeschool teens from all across the nation-- students are motivated by sharing ideas and written work and projects with their virtual classmates, and some courses involve collaborative work on selected assignments. Students also gain many new computer skills and become 'tech savvy' in a new way-- something many colleges expect. Students also benefit from having outside real deadlines-- and seeing everyone else in the class work to meet these goals can help a less organized student to improve, along with guidance from the teacher. All of our AP online teachers are also happy to write personal recommendation letters for students, another help for college admissions and scholarship applications. We hope you'll find benefits to taking part, too!

IV. The Literature Requirement

The purpose of this section is to clarify the requirements for a PHAA English course.

What Does “Read” Mean?

There has been confusion over what is meant by “read 25 books.” Eith a number of families thinking this could mean that the student *listened* to a good portion of the books as someone read aloud. PHAA fully encourages families of high school students to continue to read aloud regularly or to listen to quality audio books, often from classics or other advanced works that can be enjoyed more fully as a family, and these books should indeed be listed in the portfolio as further proof of an excellent overall English program. But by “read” we do mean *read independently by the student*. If a student has trouble with reading, especially of more challenging classics, some families have found it helpful to first watch a quality movie version of the book, listen to an audio book, or have a parent read aloud an opening chapter before the student jumps into reading it on his own. Many somewhat weak readers have really gained a new sense of their own capabilities by pushing themselves to complete the required 25 books, including three classics—students do not gain this same boost if they know they have taken the easy way out. Handicapped students may need an adaptation of this requirement, in which case the course would be labeled as *adapted*.

What is a Literature Anthology?

Many families choose to have their students read a literature anthology in place of 10 books. A literature anthology is a large collection of many quality short stories, poems, essays, plays, and excerpts from novels appropriate for a high school level student, along with helpful background info to aid a student in appreciating and understanding the works. One mother wrote to us recently saying that she wished they had realized they could have read selections from several different literature anthologies, counting the cumulative total as one literature anthology—this is fine, if records are well-documented.

What Constitutes Ten Books of the Bible?

By ‘10 books of the Bible’ we trust that people won’t use this as license to scour the Bible for the very shortest possible books. This is for the serious student of the Scriptures who is ready to tackle the major Biblical books.

What is a Classic?

If you aren’t sure what books might be considered classics, just use a high school literature anthology and look over the list of writers featured. Many probably wrote longer books, novels, or plays, and these most likely could be considered classics. A classic to us basically means a *book with recognized quality that has lasted over time*. It could be from the 19th century or before, or it could be a more modern classic such as *Animal Farm* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* or Eli Weisel’s *Night*.

There are many excellent listings of classic books for college-bound students on the Internet-- just do a Google search for ‘college bound reading list’. A few families ask about “Great Illustrated Classics”— are they classics? No,

they aren’t. They are shortened and simplified versions of great literature, written at about a third grade level--**they are not high school fare**, unless it has been clearly documented that the student is far below grade level in reading ability and motivation, and that he is in an *adapted* English program (labeled on the transcript).

All of the 25 books do not have to be literary fiction. Students can read quality nonfiction— informational books on chess, politics, humorous essays, gardening ideas, or whatever. Or students might read older works on history or philosophy or religion or science—many of the Great Books are not fiction! Biographies are always a good idea too. There is plenty of room for individuality in fashioning a student’s booklist.

We hope that this rather arbitrary requirement of “25 books with three classics, or a literature *anthology* and 15 books, or 10 books of the Bible and 15 books” will actually be a way to help your student read a wider variety of books than they might otherwise have attempted on their own. We hope it will enrich their lives, and foster a new love of reading. Suggested classics many PHAA students have enjoyed:

- Louisa May Alcott— *Little Women, Little Men*
- Jane Austen—*Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility*
- Charlotte Bronte—*Jane Eyre, Villetta*
- Pearl Buck— *The Good Earth, Peony*
- Stephen Crane—*The Red Badge of Courage*
- Daniel Defoe—*Robinson Crusoe*
- Charles Dickens—*Tale of Two Cities, Oliver Twist*
- George Eliot—*Silas Marner, Middlemarch*
- Edna Ferber—*So Big, Show Boat*
- Benjamin Franklin—*Autobiography*
- Alex Haley—*Roots*
- Nathaniel Hawthorne—*Scarlet Letter, House of Seven Gables*
- Ernest Hemingway—*Old Man and the Sea,*
- Homer- *The Odyssey, Iliad*
- Henrik Ibsen- *Hedda Gabler, A Doll’s House*
- Rudyard Kipling--*Kim, Captains Courageous, Stalky & Co.*
- Harper Lee—*To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Jack London—*Call of the Wild, White Fang, Martin Eden*
- Herman Melville—*Moby Dick, Billy Budd, Typee*
- James Michener—*The Source, Tales of the South Pacific*
- George Orwell—*Animal Farm, 1984*
- Chiam Potok—*The Chosen, The Promise*
- William Shakespeare—*Hamlet, Macbeth, The Tempest*
- Sophocles—*Oedipus Rex, Antigone*
- John Steinbeck—*Of Mice and Men, East of Eden*
- Harriet Beecher Stowe—*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
- Jonathan Swift—*Gulliver’s Travels*
- Leo Tolstoy—*War and Peace, Anna Karenina*
- Henry David Thoreau—*Walden*
- Mark Twain—*Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, Prince and the Pauper*
- Leon Uris—*Exodus, Mila 13*
- Booker T. Washington—*Up from Slavery*
- Thornton Wilder— *Our Town, Bridge of San Luis Rey*

Or choose from among hundreds of others. Enjoy the new worlds of reading that classic books, and wide general reading in books *you* choose, can open up for you!

V. What is a Speech?

“But what do you mean by a *speech*?” the somewhat anxious mom asks on the phone. She’s just read of PHAA’s requirement that all high school students must give a speech during each year in order to gain a full English credit.

First, it’s probably easier to say what *doesn’t* meet the speech requirement. Some families have asked if reciting a poem, or the Gettysburg Address, or a favorite Psalm, or a monologue from a Shakespeare play can count. These are all very valuable activities, and can teach kids many things, including the type of voice projection and expression that will be useful when a student gives their own speech. But these don’t qualify for giving a speech— this is recitation, something quite different. Lincoln giving the Gettysburg Address at the cemetery counted as giving a speech— your student acting it out does not. The emphasis in our requirement is not just on the student physically speaking out loud in an effective voice, but on the thought and planning that goes into developing a talk or presentation.

Likewise acting in a play does *not* count as giving a speech— unless, that is, the student wrote the play, as one evaluator at our recent annual meeting stated! Students who are active in drama productions through community theatre or their local support group might want to explore getting a drama credit for their arts and humanities requirement— but acting in and of itself should not count as giving a speech.

But what about reading aloud your own story at a homeschoolers writing club, or sharing a book response at a literature discussion group? Close, but probably no hit. We don’t have the but-Abe-Lincoln-really-wrote-it problem, but the emphasis is really on *reading* aloud, and that is just a bit different. Again, these sorts of group activities are marvelous and very beneficial and really help homeschoolers improve their writing or their understanding of various subjects. But it’s just not quite the same. There may not be any need to really learn to project, make eye contact with people, or think of grabbing your audience’s attention. No expectation that it will at least *sound* like you are just speaking rather than just reading.

Do I mean to imply that students can’t write down a speech before hand? Not at all. Abe Lincoln carefully wrote out the Gettysburg Address before he gave it, changing very little when he presented it. If our presidents can do this, and it’s considered a speech, I think high school kids should be able to also! Again, it’s that *feel* of making it seem as if you hadn’t written it first— a sense of immediacy— that I think may be key.

One student once misunderstood our description of possible ways to document that a speech had been given. Because one idea was to show the notes the student used giving the speech, she mistook this to mean that the talk could only be very sketchily written out in rough notes, and that the actual talk had to be a spontaneous expression. As a fledgling public speaker, this panicked her. Once I realized her misconception, I was able to let her know that it would be just *fine* to write out the speech completely in advance, so she could practice her exact wording and get it just how she wanted it.

Some people can speak eloquently without writing down everything beforehand—at the 1997 PHAA graduation our last student speaker, Patricia Hill, did a super job with this. She had an opening planned, and an ending written out, and a rough web of thoughts that she wanted to touch on, and that was all she needed. She’d thought about her talk, and I’m sure gone over many ideas in her head, and maybe even practiced parts aloud a few times—but it wasn’t all written out in detail first. She was able to respond to several of the other student speakers during her talk, showing how her homeschooling experience often echoed theirs—and this obviously couldn’t have been planned in advance!

Many groups are now having annual events where students can give talks to the group, to help them meet this English requirement. Some groups are starting to ask at least a few members of the audience to give brief written feedback on the students’ speech presentations, and families then include this in the portfolio. Usually these comments are very supportive of the young speaker, and help the student realize what he did well, and perhaps a few things to work on for next time.

You don’t need a homeschool group in order to find an audience for your speech. One homeschooler gave a demonstration talk about preparing special holiday desserts at a nursing home—winding up with sharing the treats she’d prepared with the residents, and encouraging them to share holiday memories. Nursing home residents are an always available and receptive audience-- just be sure to talk loudly and stay to visit!

Many homeschoolers are involved with the [National Christian Forensics and Communications Association](#). Very shy students have become confident and eager public speakers through this well-planned program of coaching and tournaments. Some PHAA students have gained positive public speaking skills through the [Mock Trial program](#).

The whole value of having regular speech requirements for students came home to me at PHAA’s 1997 graduation ceremony. One of the student talks was by Jennifer Snider, who has been homeschooled all her life. She shared about many special aspects of her homeschooling years—the important friendships, her relationship with her family, her secure faith, *and* the chance to overcome her early speech problems because she had always been required to give public talks through her 4-H work with her seeing eye puppies. She found that her difficulties were almost entirely overcome through repeated public speaking—and this was clearly evident from her terrific talk at the graduation ceremony. She, too, felt comfortable and confident enough as a speaker to add in new ideas or thoughts to her speech— you would never have guessed that this was a student who had really struggled with learning to read or talk effectively in her early years. My heart was filled as I listened to her share so honestly about her life. Public speaking had really been an important factor in helping her gain confidence and ability over the years. It can be a real help to all of our children.

VI. Research Projects

The PHAA course requirements allow you to kill two birds with one research project. You can satisfy requirements for both a subject area course credit as well as an English course composition. In addition, since colleges and graduate schools usually require students to do research projects, college-bound students can get a head start in research skills. Not only that, a research project can be fascinating, and a source of personal satisfaction. Here are some guidelines and resources for doing original research.

Guidelines

Research projects should combine and analyze information from varied sources, contain the student's own thoughts, and be written in the student's own words. Often homeschoolers who are fresh out of public schools--and even a few long term homeschoolers--have no idea how to write anything in their own words. At evaluation time, they present a report that is more or less copied out of an encyclopedia or textbook with just a few words changed. Such compositions are not acceptable and are actually illegal plagiarism.

In order to avoid plagiarizing, some students first think of all the possible questions they may have about the topic. Then their notes from many different sources seek to answer these questions--not just parrot the text. As they make notes they will put all information and ideas in their own words. It is often suggested to close the book while you take notes. Then students can create an outline which rearranges their questions and notes in a way that develops their thesis or main point, making the many ideas they've read their own.

Another technique is to read widely from many sources, sometimes taking notes, sometimes not. Then write a fast first draft of the paper without looking at your notes at all so that you put the information down in your own way and in your own words. A second draft can be written after looking back at your notes or source-books so that details can be filled in.

Any speaker knows that if he wants to keep his audience listening, he has to make his talk lively and engaging. He has to start with an introduction that gives the listener a reason to keep listening. Then he has to tell little stories or anecdotes along the way to keep their attention. At the end, he has to draw his talk together and make his point. The same is true with writing a major paper.

Research Sources

Encyclopedias or textbooks shouldn't be the beginning and end of a real research project. They could be a starting place, a place to gather first ideas together and assess what resources are out there. But don't stop there. Other sources include non-fiction books and magazines, newspapers, Internet websites, field trips, videos, and interviews. Some of the best research projects include interviews, such as Laurie Hartranft's paper about the Great Depression which wove in her interviews with older people who lived through the depression, and Abigail Hart's paper comparing missionaries of the present and past, which wove in the

responses that she received when she wrote letters to several missionaries.

Finding a Topic

It's not always easy for students to find a topic they want to investigate. Finding something related to your general studies for the year is always a good starting place, but even there students can have a hard time narrowing their focus. One year our daughter Molly wanted to do something related to Pennsylvania, as she was focusing on US and PA history that year. She further narrowed that down to researching something related to the Pittsburgh region, where we live. Browsing through a large book full of old photos and paintings of the area, she was struck by some dramatic pictures of a large fire that had devastated the city in 1845--that would be her topic, she declared.

We soon headed off to a major Pittsburgh library to find more. Molly uncovered many books and even diaries written in the 1800's that discussed the fire. Then we made the best find--a whole file of newspaper articles of the time! Molly eventually got so involved in this topic that her research paper turned into a detailed and lively historical fiction novel about the event, complete with historical notes at the end. I'd at first wondered if this would be too narrow a topic, but often the more focused the better. If she had tried to do a paper on "all" of Pennsylvania or Pittsburgh history, it would have been cursory and oversimplified--this tight focus helped her really develop her ideas and create a unique book.

Setting Deadlines

Whenever you engage in a project you need a deadline, or a project can drag on and on. Some homeschoolers get most of their other work completed, and then focus upon their research paper beginning a month or two before their evaluation. That way their meeting with the evaluator can provide a deadline.

Others write major papers for contests which provide the deadlines, as well as some good guidance for how to complete research projects-- and substantial prizes for winners. Several PHAA students have won college scholarships at the state or national level of such contests.

VII. Excellence

I am almost afraid to write this section. I can hear some parents reading this and comparing their students to a composite super student. Please keep in mind that I will be talking about dozens of different homeschooled students whom I have met in my many evaluations of homeschooled high school students throughout Pennsylvania. Please do not measure your son or daughter against this composite!

There is another danger that scares me almost as much. Some parents will think that these students that I describe did it all themselves. They will expect their own children to do it all themselves. Most times, the “rest of the story” never gets told. The excellent writers did not become full blown excellent writers overnight. They had parents who made them write when writing was still too difficult. They had parents who found ways to publish their compositions so that they could find the enjoyment that writing can bring. Yet, in most homeschooling publications, this one included, it will seem that the students accomplished it all on their own.

And yet I will take the risk because by telling about these accomplishments I hope to inspire parents and their students to excel in their own programs. The accomplishments that I will tell you about are ones that I wrote about in my letters of evaluation for home schooled high school students in Pennsylvania. We encourage evaluators to highlight excellence in their written evaluations.

Try to pretend that you are a college admissions officer or an employer reading these evaluations. Wouldn't you want to enroll or hire these students? I hope that you will see why I think the written evaluations attached to the transcript may be the most important part of the transcript. They let the world see some of the ways that your homeschooled student excels.

Also a word of caution: Not all of the PHAA evaluators recognize the excellence of your program in their evaluations. I urge you to find an evaluator who does, since the evaluation letters go out to colleges and employers as part of your student's transcript. The PHAA Bylaws state:

In the letters of evaluation which will be attached to the transcripts, evaluators are urged to recognize: (1) high-quality work, (2) service activities, and (3) individual initiative demonstrated by the student. Furthermore, these letters of evaluation must include a substantive narrative containing observations of the specific home education program. Evaluators who violate this provision shall be prohibited from renewing their PHAA membership.

Strengths of Home Education

High school at home is working. Our students are treasuring their close relationships with their parents and siblings. They are reading more than many students in schools and scoring higher on exams such as the SAT's which are used for college entrance and scholarships. More importantly, they are developing self initiative and responsibility which means that they will be effective

adults.

Sometimes homeschooled students learn even when they do not have a teacher who can help them. When they do so, they not only learn the subject matter, but they learn that they can teach themselves.

For example, one homeschooling mother, was teaching her son, Will, algebra using the Saxon textbook series. They made it together through the *Algebra I* textbook and were part way through the *Algebra II* textbook when he turned to her one day and said, “Mom, wouldn't it be easier if you let me do it myself?” She was taken aback for a minute, and then said, “Well, all right, Will, you can try it yourself. We'll see how you do on the tests.”

From the point that Will took over teaching himself his scores on the weekly tests went up and up and up. When he made a mistake it was up to him to go back to the examples and figure out the mistake himself. He got so good at math that he pursued a science major in college.

And homeschoolers are not only teaching themselves from textbooks; they are also teaching themselves through service activities, completing projects, and writing term papers. Homeschooled graduates are often the sort of people who don't have to take orders from someone else. They can set their own goals and carry them out. It could be that the self-initiative that they learn is more important than the content of any course.

Leadership and Service

A typical criticism of homeschooling is that children will not learn to be properly socialized. One person asked me whether homeschoolers were being properly prepared to be privates in the army. I responded by suggesting that they were being prepared to be generals. Woodrow Wilson, Clara Barton, Thomas Edison, George Patton — the history books are full of the exploits of homeschooled leaders of the past.

I begin almost every written evaluation with a description of some of the extra-curricular activities of the high school student. Some of these students are especially excelling in the leadership that they show in these activities.

Sometimes homeschoolers take leadership in the activities of an organization. Here's a paragraph I wrote about a boy who assumed many responsibilities when he participated with the *Boys and Girls Club*:

I am impressed with the extra-curricular and service activities which he participated in this year through Boys and Girls Club of PA. He has coached hockey teams and whiffle ball teams for younger children, and organized a basketball team for high school age children which he participated on himself. He takes the teaching aspect of his job as a coach seriously. He told me during our interview that he enjoys teaching young athletes. As a result, the teams that he coaches usually do very well in competitive play.

Sometimes they take leadership within their own families. Here's a paragraph I wrote about a girl who organized a family event:

Her growing leadership abilities were evident this year when she organized a fall party that was to be a wholesome alternative for kids to the “trick-or-

treat” sort of Halloween. In order to prepare for the event, she borrowed several books from the library. One called *Holiday Cookbook* helped her to plan what foods to make. One called *A Pumpkin in a Pear Tree* helped her plan the games to organize. One called *Haunts and Taunts* helped her plan crafts, such as apple candles, that the people at the party could make....

Sometimes students engage in leadership activities within their homeschool support group:

I am impressed with the extra-curricular and service activities which she has participated in this year including volunteering at the YWCA as a preschool swimming instructor and assisting with the administration of the National Geography Bee for the Adams County Homeschoolers Group.

Sometimes they show leadership and kindness in their activities related to their religious groups:

He continues to take responsibility in activities with children. This year he helped teach a toddler Sunday School class each Sunday with about ten active youngsters. He has also been involved in service to older people. He visited local nursing homes and personally delivered a Christmas present and stayed for a lengthy visit with an elderly shut-in.

Religious activities and a commitment to service often go hand in hand, as I noted in this evaluation:

I am impressed with the extra-curricular and service activities which she participated in this year in conjunction with the teen group led by Rabbi Marc Margolis. Once each month she has fulfilled a commitment in the social action area by feeding the homeless, working in the Hebrew School, or visiting an old age home.

Others show leadership by engaging in professional activities. For example, I wrote this about a homeschooled senior who is an amazing musician:

I am impressed with the leadership that she has displayed in her many activities.

This year, she managed the St. Aloysius String Quartet, which she also participated in as its cello player. Managing this quartet involved her with making arrangements for its many performances — some charitable, some paid.

Her leadership activities at a fine arts camp at Geneva College this year included teaching an introduction to musical instruments class and leading the orchestra rehearsals most of the time, a new responsibility for her.

She has also continued to teach private lessons on piano, violin, viola, and cello to fourteen students on a weekly basis. She is an excellent teacher who communicates her positive attitude to her students. I asked her, during our interview, who she would pass her good students to when she

began college next year. She said, “All my students are good!”

Some show their leadership and their caring attitude through their service activities which may even lead into future life work:

I am impressed with the extra-curricular and service activities which she participated in this year, especially her many service activities with retarded and crippled children. Every Monday night and Saturday she volunteers as a swimming coach where she teaches retarded children both swimming and diving. Every Tuesday she helps retarded children with track and field including such activities as softball throw, long jump, and running. She also helps crippled children learn to swim. She is a very responsible coach and helper in all of these activities. She plans to pursue a career related to her interest in handicapped children.

Demonstrating Responsibility

Many students keep the documentation that is required for the home education law. I remark about this when I write evaluation letters. Here are some comments similar to those that I have written in a number of evaluations:

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of her self-initiative. She is learning how to carry out goals that she sets for herself. I cannot think of any better preparation for becoming a self-initiating adult. This year she kept her own excellent daily log, and put together her own excellent portfolio album, demonstrating her growing responsibility.

Madalene and Tom Murphy have long been helping their own children set their own goals and carry them out beginning in the early grades and extending right through high school at home. They have spoken about the process at a number of homeschooling conferences. Each summer they sit down with each of their children and work out some general ideas of what they will do for the year. Then each weekend, usually on Sunday, they sit down with each child individually and talk about what happened the week before and write down what needs to be done during the coming week. During Emily’s final two years of high school, she “carried goal setting to its final stage.” As Tom and Madalene describe it in their booklet entitled *Negotiating Structure*:

She purchased a daily calendar with a two-page per day layout. In the back of her monthly booklet she would record the weekly goals that resulted from our discussions. She would then use one calendar page to plan out her goals for the day, usually on her own, and the other page to record extra projects she did, information she wanted to remember, or subjects she wanted to pursue further. (p.20)

Tom and Madalene’s book is one of those rare looks into the story behind the accomplishments which does not hide the fact that there is often a long process of growth and close and supportive involvement with parents before children

“do it all themselves.”

Completing Projects

While the public school day is so broken up that students rarely have enough time to devote to completing a time consuming project, many homeschooling students devote that time and complete those projects. In doing so, they demonstrate an amazing amount of self-initiative. What better preparation could there be for becoming an adult who can take on big projects?

Many homeschooled children find computers to be a special area of interest. Here's a project that was completed by a homeschooling ninth grader using graphics programs on his family's Macintosh computer:

After researching Neptune using several sources including newspaper and magazine articles, he created some very nice graphics which illustrate several aspects of the planet. Some of these graphics are three dimensional. He created them on his family's Macintosh computer by combining several different graphics programs. Although his father does desk-top publishing as part of his professional work, he is the family member who has taken the time to study the various manuals and is the family expert on how to use the programs.

Some homeschooled children engage in scientific experiments where they don't know the outcome before hand. Here's a sociology experiment that was completed by a homeschooling 10th grader.

His achievement was recognized when his science fair project won second place at the Bucks County Science Fair. He did a project about social norms in which he examined people's behavior when a sign was present and not present. He set up a sign at a grocery store telling people to wipe their feet, and then he observed people entering the store and he classified the people and their behavior. He had hypothesized that older people would be more observant of a social norm than younger people and that females would be more compliant than males. While his hypotheses were not confirmed he did achieve some interesting findings. His write-up was quite scholarly and thoughtful. His mother, a sociologist, was able to guide him through the project and assist him with collecting the data.

His ninth grade brother did an engineering experiment:

His achievement was recognized when his science fair project won third place at the Bucks County Science Fair and an honorable mention at the Delaware Valley Science Fair. His experiment explored the influence of varying the number of blades upon windmill efficiency. His hypothesis was that the greater the number of blades, the higher the voltage that would be produced by a miniature windmill. He tried 6, 8, 12, and 16 paddle designs, and found that the windmill with the most blades was the most efficient. His windmills were an engineering feat in themselves. He used shim

stock metal to make the blades, cutting blades with tin snips, and bending them precisely to a 25 degree angle. He attached the blades to the mechanical end of a little electric motor which then worked backwards to generate electricity. This was a most impressive project which demonstrated his grasp of the scientific method as well as his mechanical ingenuity.

Often homeschooled students appreciate the time that they can devote to completing art projects. Here is one example:

Perhaps her strongest area is, and continues to be, art. She has appreciated the opportunity that home education offers to permit her to work for extended periods of time on her art projects. Her work is of extraordinary quality. Her portfolio shows off the wide range of her abilities from detailed portraits to impressionistic water colors. She is clearly a very gifted artist.

Here's part of an evaluation of a homeschooled student who showed much initiative in her music activities:

As part of her music course this year, she has been writing songs which she sings and plays on the guitar. As part of our interview she played and sang *Waiting to See Heaven's Door*, a beautiful touching song that she wrote. Her ability to compose songs is one more indication of her growing self-initiative.

Often, the extraordinary time that students spend on these projects results in them achieving much recognition from adults. Here is a paragraph about a boy who received honors for his skill with wood carving:

He has also continued his good progress with wood carving and painting. His outstanding skill in this area was recognized this year when he won first prize for sculpture in a state-wide fine arts competition sponsored by the Keystone Christian Education Association. This year he has read many books about woodcarving and wrote a very long, informative, carefully footnoted report about wood carving. He has also joined two carving clubs and has enjoyed the opportunity this year to meet and talk as an equal with adults who share his intense interest in this field.

Similarly, here is a paragraph from my evaluation of a girl who received much recognition for her work with piano:

But most extraordinary of all have been her continuing accomplishments as a pianist. She takes both violin and piano lessons. I had the delightful opportunity, during our interview, to hear her play "Great is Thy Faithfulness" on piano. I cannot adequately describe her full rich sound. Suffice to say that this year she won a first place trophy at a national sacred music piano competition sponsored by Bob Jones University. She says that her experience attending and winning this competition was the most exciting of her life.

Some students devote extraordinary amounts of time to

social studies projects. Here's a selection from an evaluation that I wrote about a girl who enjoyed making historical costumes:

She has become especially interested in history this year, as she has worked diligently with her textbook, *United States History in Christian Perspective* published by A Beka Books. She is now considering a career in Museum Science and made three Garibaldi blouses and a skirt from the civil-war era. As part of our interview she modeled it for me and I can testify as to its striking appearance. I was quite impressed by her 11 page research report entitled *A Glimpse of Women's Clothing from 1700 - 1820*. It was interesting to see how fashions changed to more classical styles as a result of the French Revolution. I especially liked her many carefully drawn illustrations of the clothing styles which accompanied the report.

Some projects create new things which are directly useful to the student or to the student's family or church. For example, one homeschooled girl engaged in a library science project which was very useful for her family:

Her family has an extensive home library which she has cataloged with a card system so that each book can be found by author or title. This is just one example of the many responsibilities that she has successfully discharged.

Some students complete projects so that they can enjoy the results of their effort. Here is my description of a project where a homeschooled boy showed much initiative when he customized the interior of his pick-up truck:

He also made progress with electronics. Among his hands-on projects was customizing the interior of his pick-up truck by adding a CB unit, several new gauges, and a cup holder. This project involved him with much electrical work as some of the electrical circuits were able to operate only when the ignition was turned on, others operated only when the headlights were turned on, and others operated at all times.

Similarly, some homeschooled students show much ingenuity when they create things for themselves to use:

He also continues to make good progress with wood shop. Among his impressive projects was an arm wrestling exercise machine which he invented, designed, and built himself. The machine includes a lever and a pulley which allows a person to lift a weight by making the motion used by people who are arm wrestling. In order to work out the final design, he tried several different alternatives, finally arriving at one that was extremely sturdy. This project illustrates his abilities as a wood worker as well as his creativity.

This same boy also created a very useful item for his church:

Among his service activities this year, he built a

bulletin board for the Swamp Church Library. The bulletin board, which features a reversible exterior (bulletin board or peg board) and sunken screws with plugs making them invisible, is another beautiful example of his craftsmanship.

One homeschooling girl creates useful materials which she can sell out of the wool from her family's small flock of sheep:

Another aspect of her laboratory work has been tied in with the craft work of her art class. Her family has a small flock of sheep which they clip with hand shears. She often cards and spins the wool (which she does very well) and then dyes the skeins of wool. To do the dyeing she must mix vegetable derivatives, such as sassafras and yellow onion, with mordents. She keeps a journal about her dyeing experiments which includes pasted on samples of the actual wool that results. She showed me a few of the resulting skeins, and they are often quite beautiful.

Excelling in the English Course

An extraordinary number of well known writers have been educated at home. I believe that this will continue to be true based upon the extraordinary reading and writing programs that I encounter in the course of my evaluations.

One homeschooling mother began to educate her daughter at home because her daughter was beginning to lose interest in learning as a result of her school education. Now, her daughter has become inspired in a number of subject areas to pursue subjects during her free time even after she had completed her required work. I was amazed by her quality reading of Shakespeare's plays which goes far beyond what is ever read in a typical high school course. I wrote:

She has made much progress with English. Her study of Shakespeare is an example of home education at its best. Among the plays that she read and enjoyed this year were *The Merchant of Venice*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*. She started the year reading plays out loud with her mother. When she had gotten the gist of a play, her mother would borrow the video from the Giant Eagle. When watching the video, she could stop and rewind when she had missed something. After a while, she got used to Shakespeare's language and was able to read new plays and understand them faster than she could watch them on a video. Her English course also included consistent work with grammar, many excellent reports and essays, and much supplementary reading. I especially enjoyed her splendid essay where she retold her grandmother's story about the birth of her father. She has completed an extraordinary amount of good quality writing.

I am often impressed by quality reading. In general home-educated children read far more than school-educated

children. This shows up in the consistently higher scores that home-educated children receive when they take standardized achievement tests. I was very impressed at the reading abilities of this student:

She has made much progress with English. She has read a number of classics this year including a play by Shakespeare, *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling, and *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo. She is persistent, even when she does not particularly like a book. For example, when I asked her about *Les Miserables* she said, "Once I got through the first couple hundred pages I did not want to put it down!" An essay she wrote about *Kim* emphasizes the theme of questing for the meaning of life. An essay she wrote about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe emphasizes Stowe's artistry in contrasting different attitudes toward slavery and different types of slave owners.

I have seen an extraordinary amount of excellent writing in the homeschooling portfolios and have tried to recognize it whenever I could. Sometimes I am especially struck by the quality of a poem:

She has made much progress with English, reading over 60 books including such classics as *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Tempest*. Her compositions have been quite prolific and skilled. Most have been written as part of her participation in an expository writing course from Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. I found her essay called "Alex" to be quite moving. I especially liked her poem called "Performance" which captures the excitement of a performance night. She is an excellent writer.

Sometimes publication and length indicate quality:

He has made much progress in composition this year. Several of his stories and essays were published this year in a book called *Writing from Home: A Portfolio of Homeschooled Children's Writing* by Susan Richman. These stories and essays, including an eighteen page short novel, were chosen by the editor because they were well written with well developed characters, and because of their delightful humor. He is an excellent writer.

I was very impressed by one student's engrossing start to a research paper. The student, whose father is a pastor, had learned about the idea of starting a composition with an interesting anecdote by listening to his father's sermons:

Among his excellent reports was a 10 page research paper about the history and development of money which included a bibliography of eight different sources and footnotes. He prepared for writing his paper by taking notes from the various sources and writing an outline. His paper is written in a very interesting and engaging style. It begins with an attention capturing paragraph and then proceeds in a well organized fashion. This paper is an important achievement. It demonstrates that he has learned

how to do library research, how to write in an organized fashion, and how to write in a style that will engage his reader's interest.

Clearly, the reading and writing requirements can be met in a quality fashion which demonstrates the excellence of the home education program.

Ways to Organize High School Courses

Homeschoolers participate in a wide variety of home education programs and organize high school courses in a wide variety of ways. All of these ways permit excellence to occur. The PHAA diploma was specifically designed to fit this diversity.

The most common way to organize a high school course is to use a textbook. PHAA families may use textbooks for some courses but not others. Math, especially, is almost always learned by using a textbook, although even here many students supplement text work with participation in various math competitions.

Sometimes students go the extra mile with their textbooks, especially if they have a strong interest in a subject area. I was especially impressed with how diligently a homeschooled girl had worked in her Biology textbook because she planned a career as a veterinarian:

She has become especially interested in biology this year, as she has worked diligently with her textbook, *Biology: Lord's Living Creation* and with its laboratory manual. She completed her laboratory work this year in conjunction with a set of video-taped demonstrations that accompany her laboratory manual. She supplemented her laboratory work with a scrap book she kept on flowers, and with hands-on dissection of frogs. She is very thorough in her study of biology because she plans a career in veterinary science. In preparation for tests, she carefully surveys and reads each chapter taking careful notes in order to be sure that she knows all of the new vocabulary that is introduced.

Similarly, another homeschooled student worked especially hard with his distance course texts because he planned to be an auto mechanic. I was impressed with his ability to combine study with practice:

He also has made progress with automotive mechanics, working through a correspondence course from the School of Automotive Mechanics. Topics covered included brake systems and repairs, suspension and steering systems, engine components, fuel systems, transmissions, drive systems, and electrical systems. He was able to apply some of his knowledge when he successfully replaced the timing belt and water pump on his mother's car.

A number of homeschooled students have been able to teach themselves algebra using the incremental Saxon textbook. I have often put this paragraph, or one very similar, in my high school evaluations:

She also continues to make good progress with

mathematics through consistent work with the excellent Algebra textbook published by Saxon. This series provides a rigorous approach to mathematics which continually reviews and expands upon previous knowledge with each problem set. Her scores on the problem sets clearly demonstrate her progress. She has been growing in her ability to teach herself from the well explained examples in the textbook. I can not overemphasize the importance of this growing independence in mathematics learning. It indicates that she will be able to teach herself from books when she needs to learn things as an adult. She is learning problem solving each time that she misses a problem and finds her own mistakes.

Other families have been able to organize very strong home education courses without using textbooks. I was especially impressed with the unit approach in one home which combined social studies, science, Bible and English. The mother, who is a former teacher, organized her year into four 9-week quarters. For each quarter her two students, an eighth grade boy and a tenth grade girl, had to complete both a social studies project and a science project. They would choose their own topics and begin doing the research for each project with a great deal of enthusiasm. Then there would come a time in the middle of the nine weeks when things would lag. They would be faced with the prospect of writing up the project. The eighth grade boy would especially need some prodding to get him writing. Once started writing, however, he would regain his enthusiasm for the topic.

If both students completed both projects within eight weeks, the family would take a week off just to travel and go on field trips. Often the field trips would be to places related to their projects. For example, after the girl wrote about submarines, they went on a trip to Connecticut where they toured a submarine.

Here is what I wrote about some of her papers and projects for her tenth grade year:

Her social studies, science, and Bible courses have combined reading of her textbooks with extensive research and writing activities surrounding the papers that she has written about such topics as the Vietnam War, submarine involvement in the world wars, volcanoes and earthquakes, Japan, and Morse code. I especially enjoyed her humor in the first chapters of her report on submarines where she discusses the troubles that plagued the initial attempts to invent submarines.

To give you more ideas of the sorts of projects that they completed, here is what I wrote about her eighth grade brother's projects for his evaluation:

His social studies, science, and Bible courses have combined reading of his textbooks with extensive research and writing activities surrounding the papers that he has written about such topics as fish, constellations, Switzerland, the Renaissance, and the Reformation. He also wrote (using calligraphy)

and illustrated a book for children about Martin Luther. These reports are very well written and show his ability to take notes, organize his ideas, and write a clear exposition. For a report on fish, for example, he read *Freshwater Aquarium Fish* by Dawes and *The New Aquarium* by Scheurmann. Then he set up his own aquarium, and wrote a report which described the biology of fish, kinds of fish, the senses of fish, and told how to set up an aquarium. His report also told of his own difficulties as he learned how to keep fish healthy in his own aquarium.

I was also very impressed by the combined world history program put together by another homeschooling family which involved their high school daughter in reading a number of difficult historical books and novels:

She has made much progress with English and world history through an integrated course which combines the subjects. As a result she has gained an appreciation of how they interact with one another. I continue to be impressed by the depth of her thought and the quality of her writing in her reports related to these fields.

This year she read quality books from around the world. Among her favorites were *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare, *The Trial* by Kafka, *I Claudius* by Graves, *The Prince* by Machiavelli, and *Inside the Third Reich* by Speer. I discussed Machiavelli and Speer with her during our interview. It was clear to me that she was able to think about political situations of other times and places and relate them to events happening today. The list of books that she read this year is truly remarkable. She told me that she is considering taking an Advanced Placement English course at home next year. My response was that I thought that she might have taken one, without knowing it, this year.

One of her essays compared the writing of Ayn Rand to that of George Orwell. While both discuss some of the same themes, such as the relation between the individual and society in an oppressive future setting, she found Orwell to be much the better writer. Another of her essays discussed opposing viewpoints around the issue of censorship and argued persuasively against it. She is a lucid writer who can clearly think through her writing.

Another approach to high school courses has been to utilize private tutors. Here is a part of my evaluation of the same homeschooled student, who studied geometry with the assistance of a private tutor:

She has also been making good progress with geometry, especially since January when she began to work with a private tutor for this subject area. Her mother reports that this tutor has a real talent for making math interesting and that her confidence in this area has grown by leaps and bounds. Her tutor comes over once a week, and gives her

assignments which she completes throughout the whole week. Her tutor reports that her comprehension of the subject has improved significantly and that she is “doing very well.”

Some homeschoolers have reversed the tutor-student relationship and organized a course around the homeschooled student tutoring someone else. It is said that one of the best ways to learn is to teach. Here are some of the comments I made in an evaluation of a homeschooled student who taught his uncle algebra:

He has continued to develop his ability to apply mathematics to complex problems. During our interview he told me that he finds the multi-step thought-provoking word problems in the George Lenchner book to be intriguing. He enjoys solving problems that on the surface look unsolvable, and he likes solving math puzzles including cryptarithms. When he tutored his uncle in algebra, he used George Lenchner’s book [*Creative Problem Solving in School Mathematics*] as one of his main resources.

Sometimes students will get together for various studies and the families share expenses for a skilled tutor. With the growing number of homeschool weekly co-op programs, these options are easier to find-- and teens can offer really benefit from the regular contact with other homeschool students and with varied teachers. The support group listing at www.pahomeschoolers.com includes many co-op programs. Many find that a small-group co-op works well-- one support group of junior high school students got together weekly to study German with a professional tutor from Germany. They also met to do biological laboratory work with dissections. One of the homeschooled boys showed good leadership abilities as he showed the others how to work with dissecting. In his evaluation I wrote:

He has also made good progress as a leader in a biology class for homeschooled students which involved much hands-on activity with dissections, microscope, and magnifying glass. At this class, he took leadership in performing the dissections. Among the dissections he performed were dissections of a clam, a frog, a mussel, a perch, a crayfish, and a grasshopper. I was especially impressed with his careful drawings of onion skin cells as he saw them under varying degrees of magnification. These drawings were in conjunction with his studies of cells in his biology textbook.

There are other resources that are accessible to homeschooled students. Several students take laboratory courses by watching laboratory experiments performed on A Beka videos. Other students use educational television shows for some of their work. For example, one homeschooled girl studies French and Latin partly by watching a French television show on Public Broadcasting and partly by reading books in French. I wrote:

She has also been making progress with her studies of French and Latin. Her program has included

regularly watching a French language instructional television program called *French in Action*, and reading books written in other languages. A highlight of her year was reading Saint-Exupery’s *Le Petit Prince* in the original French. I cannot think of a better way to learn a foreign language than by reading books written in that language.

Sometimes, volunteer work with professionals in the community is a good way to learn about a subject area. For example, one girl who plans to be a veterinarian has volunteered to occasionally help a local veterinarian with his tasks. In her evaluation I noted:

She has also aided veterinarians in preparation for her possible career in veterinary medicine. For example she helped inoculate 100 cows at a nearby farm and helped spay a cat.

Many homeschoolers are also now taking college courses through dual-enrollment programs at area colleges-- both community colleges and private and state-related universities often welcome capable high school students. Some colleges have even offered special science lab courses for the sciences just for homeschool students, and at least one college, St. Vincent’s College in Latrobe PA, offers its own special homeschool weekly classes in their *Step-Up Program*, taught by college students who are education majors. Other homeschoolers are taking part in distance courses offered by colleges, or using some of the extensive ‘open course’ university course materials available free online.

In Sum

There are a number of ways to achieve excellence in home education programs. Some achieve excellence through their leadership activities, some through their self-initiative, some do exemplary work in reading or writing.

Again, I urge parents not to measure their students against some imaginative composite of all of these exemplary students. Instead think about some ways that you can help your own students work toward excellence in your own high school home education programs.

I have suggested many ways that high school courses may be organized for excellence. While many homeschoolers use textbooks, others base certain courses on wide reading, writing, educational television, taking part in academic competitions, Internet resources, co-op classes, distance courses, college programs, or work with tutors. A parent does not need to feel they must be the sole teacher or ‘expert’ in every subject area. And even if you don’t do as strong a job in some subjects as a top school might, it may not matter in the long run. There are other things that you are doing that may be more important. One study of PHAA graduates, by a Penn State researcher, found that 73% said that they would homeschool their own children--and some of them are already doing so!

VIII. Graduation

PHAA graduation ceremonies are held each year in June. Two different graduation ceremonies are scheduled for each year, one in Western and one in Eastern Pennsylvania. Details. Info about the ceremonies appears in the *The Excelsior* and on the [PHAA website](#).

Each ceremony begins with the graduates proceeding into the hall in their caps and gowns to the tune of *Pomp and Circumstance*, followed by an invocation. The graduates wear caps and gowns in a wide variety of colors, illustrating the diversity of homeschooling.

Next comes the commencement address. Past commencement speakers have included members of the PA House of Representatives, homeschool fathers and mothers, and officials at the PA Department of Education.

Then comes the main part of the program which features addresses by several of the graduates and performances by graduates and sometimes their friends and families. Past performances have included instrumental selections, songs composed and sung by the students, ballet and Irish step dance performances, magic shows, martial arts demonstrations, family string ensembles, and siblings singing together in harmony.

At the end of the program families are called up on the stage one at a time to give their diplomas to their graduates. Sometimes parents, brothers, sisters, and even grandparents come up on stage where they hand the graduate the diploma and move the graduate's tassel from one side of the cap to the other. One family member can say a few words in recognition of their student.

These ceremonies have continued to be inspiring for the graduates, their families, and all of the other homeschoolers, relatives, and family friends who attend. You can watch our virtual graduation ceremony from 2020 (due to Covid-19) on [YouTube](#).

Other Graduation Options

Before the PHAA diploma was established I would often field questions from homeschooling parents which are similar to this note which we once received from Kim Jeffery:

I do have one question about the ramifications of the law and I was wondering whether Howard could address it in one of the newsletters sometime soon. What will be the status of homeschooled high school students as far as graduation goes? If they receive no diploma is their only option a GED? I ask this because my husband, David, has recently read a couple of articles in publications like the Wall Street Journal in which they talked about the lack of respect for GED's. The WSJ source indicated that many colleges were dissatisfied with students who had received them and that the military was unenthusiastic about taking young people with one....

In answer to Kim, and others with similar questions, I have pointed out that our homeschooling law (Act 1988-169)

does not require homeschoolers to pass the GED to get diplomas. On the contrary it specifies another option for homeschool graduation. It specifically recognizes graduation of homeschool students who complete the courses required. The PHAA diploma was instituted to take advantage of this provision. But, there are at least six other diploma options for homeschoolers in Pennsylvania:

1. **GED** This diploma is available to dropouts who can pass an equivalency test. Normally students must be 18 years of age, but they can take the test as young as 16 with a letter from a prospective employer or college. Information can be obtained from the GED office at the Department of Education (717-787-6747).

2. **One year of college.** Any Pennsylvania citizen can receive the Commonwealth high school diploma from the PA Department of Education after completing one year (30 credits) at an accredited college. Information can be obtained from the GED office at the Department of Education (717-787-6747).

3. **Distance Learning Programs.** Several online schools award diplomas, including [Christian Liberty Academy](#) (evangelical Christian), [Keystone School](#) (academically oriented), [Clonlara](#) (alternative school), [American School](#) (less rigorous, secular), and [North Dakota Center for Distance Education](#) (public school).

4. **Non-public schools.** Several of the Pennsylvania non-public schools which supervise home education programs provide diplomas to home education graduates.

5. **Approved Diploma Granting Organizations.** PHAA is not the only approved diploma granting organizations. The PA Department of Education maintains a [list of those organizations](#) that have been approved to grant diplomas to graduates of home education program. These organizations must reapply every three years, so that the Department of Education can renew its approval of their requirements and procedures.

6. **Parent Issued Diploma.** Parents can give recognized diplomas to their own children, signed by the senior year evaluator, using a diploma form on the PA Department of Education website. Such a diploma is recognized by the state of Pennsylvania and agencies of the state if given to graduates who have completed all of the graduation requirements in compliance with the home education law. However, this diploma lacks the support or a transcript or organization. Colleges want to see the transcript. Future employers hire credential-verification services to verify graduation by interviewing the organization that granted the diploma in order to verify dates of attendance and graduation. Not having the help of an organization, parents who choose this option need to work out alternative ways to support the diplomas that they issue long into the future, or else their graduates could encounter problems with colleges and employers.

IX. On to College

Though many homeschool graduates will move directly from homeschooling into the work force, and others will continue to homeschool for college through distance programs, many PHAA graduates will attend a college. Here's a quick run-down on the steps to take for admission and scholarships.

Applying for Admission

As part of their applications, most colleges require a high school transcript, SAT or ACT scores, student essays, and letters of recommendation from adults who know the student. Some colleges also recommend or require interviews and/or submitting scores of College Board SAT Subject Tests. It is always important to meet all of the deadlines that are listed by the college in their application.

The Transcript. The PHAA transcript lists the courses that a student has taken, with the grades and credits that the student has earned. Grades can be pass/fail for some courses, but letter grades are very strongly recommended as colleges will sometimes interpret a "P" for "Pass" to be a "D." All current evaluators (an [up-to-date list](#) appears on the PHAA website) have access to PHAA's transcript program and will update the transcript following each annual evaluation of the student's portfolio of work and can update the transcript midyear as well, since most colleges want the transcript to include the names of courses that are being taken during the senior year and midyear grades if it is after January 1.

Many colleges prefer at least two years of a foreign language—check with a specific college's requirement on this issue. If a student plans to major in a field which involves mathematics, colleges expect substantially higher mathematics than just the algebra and geometry required to get a home education diploma. Remember—colleges will prefer seeing a student going beyond the minimum requirements for graduation, especially in the senior year. Strive for high goals—don't slough off!

PHAA transcripts always include a cover letter as well as the narrative evaluation letters that have been written about the student's progress each year of high school. The transcript page is the summary. The evaluation letters explain.

Colleges do not want the transcript to be sent in by the parents. Instead, they want an official copy of the transcript to be sent directly to them by PHAA or by the evaluator. Evaluators can email transcripts for current student (but not transcripts for graduates).

PHAA can email, snail mail (with a school seal), or post (to the NCAA or Common App) transcripts for current students as well as transcripts for graduates. PHAA evaluators can email the transcript for a non-graduate (replete with cover-letter and evaluation letters. In order to request that PHAA do so, use the Transcript Request Form included in this guide, or post the online version. The fee is just \$10 if mailed in, but \$15 in the PHAA store.

Letters of Recommendation. Generally homeschoolers get letters of recommendation from their evaluators and from adults with whom they have worked. These letters

should give some background about the adult, tell about the nature of the adult's relationship with the student, and also point out good qualities of the student.

Lochlanina Tobey attached several different letters of reference, including a letter from her evaluator, letters from neighbors which vouched for her trustworthiness and responsibility, letters from friends of her family who had attended the college in question, and a letter from her former employer when she was a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the YMCA.

Roger Petersen attached a number of recommendations to his applications also, including one from the artist with whom he had apprenticed, which noted that "Roger proved that he could adapt to any technical situation quite readily, confidently, and comfortably with scant directions from me." The colleges were clearly impressed by these letters. At the bottom of his acceptance letter from the Maryland Institute College of Art, there was the following note: "I thought you might find it interesting to know that the children of our Dean of Liberal Arts are homeschooled and that Dr. Shipley took a personal interest in reviewing your application and was quite impressed."

As an evaluator, I have written many letters of recommendation for the students whom I evaluate. In those letters I generally tell something about myself and my educational background, tell about my relationship to the student as an evaluator (i.e., "I have evaluated her home education program, as required by Pennsylvania law, for the past two years.") and tell good things about the student and his program, which I draw from my written narrative evaluations.

The Interview. For most colleges the interview is optional. If the student is articulate, then an interview can help answer the many questions that admissions people have about homeschooling. One homeschooling parent had been looking into the question of whether or not her daughter should elect to schedule interviews. She wrote:

The interview may be particularly important for students from non-traditional backgrounds. It provides an opportunity to explain any particularly good or bad information in the admission file, to assess the applicant's 'fit' with the institution, and to evaluate 'soft factors' like motivation and commitment. Most of the parents and school officials whom I contacted recommended that homeschool students schedule admissions interviews, which are often listed as 'optional' in the catalog; and come prepared with specific questions that demonstrate an interest in the institution."

As an artist, Roger Petersen had been collecting a portfolio of his work for some time, including published works that he helped to illustrate. He brought his portfolio with him to interviews that he scheduled at each college that he considered attending. When he scheduled interviews with admissions staff, he also scheduled interviews with the art department faculty, in hopes that they would speak to the admissions people about his talent. He also took the opportunity to look around the campus to see if he really

wanted to go to that college.

Although he would arrive at the admissions office with his parents, the admissions people wanted to interview Roger alone. Generally, the interviewers wanted to know all about homeschooling because they were curious. Roger gave them copies of the Colfax's book *Homeschooling for Excellence*, about homeschooled students who went to Harvard, and gave them copies of the standards which appear in this *Guide to the PA Homeschoolers Diploma*. Admissions staff also asked Roger questions about his experience and commitment for the field of art, looking for things that set him apart from other students. For Roger his apprenticeship to a professional artist made a big difference. The admissions people were also impressed with how well he talked with them.

Brian Gibbons usually went off on his own to attend interviews and visit campuses on "college for the weekend" or "college for the day" packaged tours. Like Roger, he was asked many questions about homeschooling during the interviews, and his poise and ease in talking with adults was noted by the admissions staff.

Julie Rearick's interview at Waynesburg College was scheduled by the admissions staff for lunch time so that the entire department could come. They were so curious about homeschooling that they pumped her for information for about 45 minutes-- they had never talked to a homeschooled student before. Julie planned to go into teaching, and the education department was particularly anxious to admit her because she would add a new way of looking at the problems in education.

Sometimes Julie would look around a campus and decide that it wasn't for her, even before she had the interview. But she went through with the interviews, knowing that she could educate the admissions people about homeschooling and make it easier for the next homeschooler that came along. Homeschoolers who apply to college are ambassadors for homeschooling.

The Application Essay. Homeschoolers should indeed discuss homeschooling in some way in application essays--remember, admissions staffers are curious and interested in how your education was unique. You should strive to write the personal essay that *only you* could possibly write.

College Board Exams

The PSAT/NMSQT is a *practice* or preliminary SAT Test, and is generally taken by 11th grade students in October-- there are now a PSAT 10 and PSAT 8/9 version available for younger students. There is no official preregistration procedure-- homeschool families simply contact a local public or private school that is giving the test, and make arrangements with the guidance counselor. Taking the PSAT enters 11th graders into the National Merit Scholarship Competition. Many families have their teen take the PSAT 10 in 10th grade, even though only the 11th grade test counts as far as National Merit is concerned. After scores are posted to student online accounts with the College Board, they can access online materials to carefully look over their mistakes and pinpoint any weak areas. Focused study can often help scores on next year's PSAT or

on the SAT.

Taking the SAT. The SAT should be taken in the spring of 11th grade or the fall of 12th grade, though it can be taken younger for talent search programs or just for practice. It is administered on selected Saturday mornings at high schools and some universities. (An alternative test, the **ACT**, is accepted at most colleges, and is often required for schools in the South or Midwest. The **SAT** has both a verbal section and a mathematics section. **Be sure to enter the PHAA school code number on your SAT or ACT registration forms online: 392-057** so that the PHAA office will receive a school copy of SAT results which we would attach to the final transcript.

Students need some sort of [photo ID to take any College Board test](#), such as a driver's license, current passport, a photo ID from your local Photo Drivers' License Center, or an official school ID card. PHAA issues a student photo ID for \$10 which meets this requirement. Registering for the SAT now [includes uploading a clear photo of yourself](#), but you still need another official photo ID on test day.

Students will feel really well prepared going into the exam if they've had the chance to practice first. There are excellent test preparation materials available.

SAT Subject Tests. The College Board SAT Subject Tests are 1-hour tests given on Saturday mornings at the same time and locations as the regular SAT Test. You can take up to three different SAT Subject Tests on the same day, but you can not take the regular SAT that day also. Each Subject Test covers a specific content area. Current tests include: Writing, Literature, American History and Social Studies, World History, Mathematics (levels I and II), many foreign languages, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. Selective colleges often require applicants to take several SAT Subject Tests. Even when not required, some homeschoolers may want to take SAT Subject Tests in their strongest areas just to demonstrate their abilities more objectively. Many students actually find that taking these tests spurs them on to thorough review of material, and the results give them perspective on how they match up to others around the country.

Getting Scholarships.

There are two kinds of scholarships available, scholarships based upon merit and scholarships based upon financial need.

Roger Petersen attended the University of the Arts in Philadelphia on a merit scholarship based upon his artistic talent. Many art schools have talent scholarships which can be earned by presenting a portfolio of art work, or demonstrating talents in music, drama, or creative writing. Other colleges offer major scholarships for strong academic preparation or for community service involvement.

There are many organizations that sponsor scholarship competitions based upon the strength of your application, writing essays, or demonstrations of artistic or musical talent. The most up-to-date info is also on-line at www.finaid.org (you'll find important tips on avoiding scholarship scams there also!).

One source of merit scholarships is the PSAT test which is used in order to determine who earns a National Merit Scholarship for college. If a student scores well enough on the PSAT (99th percentile is required), the family is informed the following September that the student is a National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist, and given the required forms required for finalist standing. Every year since 1994, a growing number of PHAA students have become National Merit Finalists, a real testament to the high quality of their home education programs.

Brian Gibbons was notified that he was a National Merit Semifinalist in September of his Senior year. He then filled out the application for finalist status, which involved writing an essay, listing his courses and grades, getting a recommendation from a teacher (he got his from his evaluator), and taking the SAT. All of this information had to be posted online by a certain date. If all of the information is furnished on time, and points to strong achievement, generally a semifinalist becomes a finalist.

Then Brian applied to the colleges that he was interested in. His family wanted him to stay on the East Coast, and if he were going to live on campus, it would have to be a Christian college. He chose to attend Liberty University. The National Merit Scholarship he earned was a \$2,000 one-time gift, but Liberty University, like many universities, has its own scholarship allowance for students who are National Merit Finalists. (Many businesses also have scholarship funds for employee's children who are finalists.) The Liberty University scholarship worked out to be full tuition and room and board for his four years. The only stipulation was that Brian had to maintain a 3.7 GPA (Grade Point Average). His average was 4.0 during his Freshman year and as part of the Debate Team he earned additional scholarship money which he could apply to his book fees.

Scholarship grants are also available based on financial need. These are generally available through the state and federal government through [PHEAA](#), the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, and through colleges. To apply for all of these programs the first step is filling out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form directly on-line at studentaid.gov. Be sure to observe all FAFSA and PHEAA deadlines. The FAFSA can be sent in after January 1st of the student's senior year and not later than May 1st, and it requires tax information from the previous year.

In order to get a PHEAA grant you must be a high school graduate. PHEAA recognizes the PHAA diploma as the equivalent of a high school diploma. **If you receive any mailings from PHEAA asking you to have your school district superintendent to sign a form stating that you have met graduation requirements, just send the form on to our office and we will handle it.**

Meeting the Deadlines

You must be organized so that you will meet the deadlines needed in applying to college.

1. **Beginning of 9th grade.** Send in your PHAA *Filing Form* (on page 28 and in the [PHAA online store](#)) with

PHAA so that you will be a member and would get notified by email and given the password whenever a new issue of *The Excelsior*, our quarterly online student newsletter, is published. Don't delay! *You can't get a diploma from PHAA if you haven't joined before graduation.*

2. **October or February of 10th grade.** (optional) Take the PSAT 10 for practice. You'll get to view test you can learn from your mistakes.)

3. **October of 11th grade.** (optional) Take the PSAT for scholarships and for SAT exam practice. (You'll get the test back so that you can learn from your mistakes.)

4. **Spring of 11th grade or Fall of 12th grade.** Take the SAT exam (or the ACT if your college prefers).

4. **Beginning of 12th grade.** File your filing form with PHAA if you did not already do so. *Last minute filing can cause problems, including denial of a diploma.* If the Filing Form is postmarked in July *after* the senior year is completed, then the fee is doubled. Those Filing Forms postmarked in August *after* completion of the senior year, are no longer accepted.

5. **Fall of 12th grade** (optional) Take some of the College Board SAT Subject Tests.

6. **Fall of 12th grade.** Apply for admission to several colleges, schedule interviews and be sure to meet each college's deadlines. Some colleges require their applications to be completed as early as January 1; early decision or rolling decision applications must be filed even earlier.

7. **Before May 1st of 12th grade.** (optional) File the FAFSA for Federal and PHEAA state grants for college based on financial need.

8. **End of 12th grade.** By June 30th you should send in the *Diploma Request Form* (on page 31 and in the [PHAA online store](#)) and your completed transcript, signed in 5 places by parent and 1 place by student). If it is postmarked in August, the Diploma Fee doubles, and by September it is too late to graduate. Colleges usually request that our office send on an official final transcript verifying graduation.

X. PHAA Evaluator Responsibilities

PHAA evaluators are the heart of this diploma program—they are the ones who actually meet with students and families, developing positive mentoring relationships as they review the student's annual portfolio. They serve as an encouraging audience for student work; as consultants on a full range of high school issues, including college or trade school admissions; as documentation coaches to help the family develop a helpful presentation; as standard setters, helping a student reach for higher goals; and as judges, helping students see if there are areas where they have fallen short of PHAA guidelines.

Home education evaluators who wish to join PHAA can mail in the form included in this guide. When evaluators sign the membership form they agree to abide by PHAA's requirements when using PHAA transcript forms.

The PHAA Board of Directors, by affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members of the Board, may suspend or expel a member for cause. When the membership of an Evaluator-member is terminated, his or her signature will no longer be accepted on transcript forms of current or future students unless and until that Evaluator-Member is reinstated.

The PHAA evaluator membership fee is \$10 per school year. In return evaluators receive:

- Notification by email whenever a new issue of our student newsletter, *The Excelsior*, is published.
- Access to a password-protected Internet Discussion Board for PHAA evaluators only where PHAA transcript forms can be downloaded.
- Voting privileges as a PHAA member.
- Inclusion in the complete listing of PHAA evaluators which appears [online](#) and in the *Excelsior*. Evaluators can post biographies, which can include photos of themselves, to go with that listing.
- Ability to award credits using the online PHAA transcript program during your membership.

Narrative Evaluation Letters

PHAA Evaluators are required to write narrative evaluation letters in which they are encouraged to discuss excellence whenever they encounter it. The second column shows examples of one-page narrative evaluation letters written by PHAA evaluators. The students' names and identifying family information have been blacked out to protect family privacy. Many evaluators write 2 page evaluations, and some actually write 3 or 4 page evaluations (please no evaluations longer than that!). These examples demonstrate that evaluators do not have to write more than one page to meet our narrative requirement.

If an evaluator writes an evaluation letter that is in a non-narrative format, the PHAA executive director, will send him or her a letter giving the evaluator a chance to rewrite it so that the evaluator will be able to renew his or her PHAA membership for the next school year. Evaluators are given the opportunity to appeal the executive director's interpretation of whether it is a substantive narrative to the PHAA Board.

Home School Evaluation

Student: [REDACTED] Grade: 10 School Year: 2006 - 2007
Supervisor of the Home Education Program: [REDACTED]
Evaluator: Mrs. Patti Stoudt, B.S. in Ed., May 1980; M.S., May 1981 from Bloomsburg State College.
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Professional Certificate # [REDACTED] 570-[REDACTED]

The Evaluation Process

A portfolio of records and materials, including a log made contemporaneously with the instruction, which designates by title the reading materials used, samples of any writings, worksheets, workbooks, and creative materials used or developed by the student was reviewed by the certified teacher.

I have reviewed the portfolio and interviewed [REDACTED] and find that [REDACTED] has provided an excellent education for her. She has complied with the law with good records and samples of [REDACTED]'s work. [REDACTED] has been receiving instruction in all of the required subjects for the time required by Act 169 of 1988.

The Student's Program

[REDACTED] had an excellent sophomore year. Her program far exceeded the credit requirements set forth by the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency. In addition to her academics, [REDACTED] again served as a volunteer at the Children's Museum in Bloomsburg. [REDACTED] served as the vice-president for her 4-H club, The Dalmatians.

Each year for her English credit, [REDACTED] is required to work in four areas: literature, grammar, composition, and speech. This year, [REDACTED]'s booklet consisted of 127 books, including more than 20 literary classics. She participated in the Write At Home online writing courses, taking classes in Writing a Research Paper and Composition 1. [REDACTED] had personal on-line instructors who corrected her writing and gave her constructive feedback. Her portfolio contained numerous samples of her writing, including both rough drafts showing corrections, and polished final drafts. [REDACTED] wrote a research paper, exceeding 2800 words, about Antarctica, citing 15 non-encyclopedic resources. For her speech this year, [REDACTED] did a presentation about Estonia to a group of other homeschoolers.

For her other subjects, [REDACTED] was required to complete either 2/3 of a textbook or log 120 entries to earn a credit. [REDACTED] did complete over 2/3 of her textbooks to earn credits in Anatomy & Physiology, Algebra 2, Spanish 2, and Biology. For Anatomy & Physiology, [REDACTED] participated in a co-op course, requiring quizzes, tests, activities, and a research paper, which she did about pacemakers. She used Teaching Textbooks for Algebra 2. She worked with a young man who is a Spanish major at a local university for Spanish 2. For Biology, she read the A Beka textbook in its entirety, did labs with a co-op group, and taught biology basics to her youngest sister. [REDACTED]'s research paper about Antarctica, combined with her trip to Scandinavia, visiting 5 different countries, certainly exceeded the requirements for a credit in World Geography. [REDACTED] took an intensive course on Mythology & Religion through Camp Susque, requiring much reading and writing, earning a 95%. [REDACTED] logged far more than 120 entries for credits in Honors Swedish 2 and Modern History. [REDACTED] attended a second-year immersion 4-week Swedish camp at Concordia Language Villages associated with Concordia College in Minnesota. Those weeks included language, culture, skits, public speaking, crafts, games, singing in a Swedish choir, and even taking a sailing course in Swedish. She earned a 97% in the program, which is listed as an accredited high school course. For Modern History, [REDACTED] followed the Tapestry of Grace curriculum. [REDACTED] logged more than 60 hours of study in each of the following areas to earn 1/2 credits in each: piano, cello, dance, and Leadership & Government. She continued piano lessons, playing in a recital, and cello lessons, playing for a dinner at church. Her dance lessons included both modern dance and ballet. [REDACTED] participated in several leadership seminars, including a 4-H leadership conference as well as a HOBY leadership course at Millersville University. HOBY stands for Hugh O'Brien Youth, named for the teacher of the course. This class involved three days of workshops, simulation government activities, and ended with a mock legislative session.

The Evaluator's Determination

I have reviewed the portfolio and have interviewed the student, and I certify that she is receiving an appropriate education.

Signed: 

Date: June 22, 2007

[REDACTED] Lane
[REDACTED] PA [REDACTED]
June 2, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

[REDACTED] Street
[REDACTED] PA [REDACTED]
Tel: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com
Bd: [REDACTED] 1991

I reviewed the log and portfolio of [REDACTED], age 14, who completed 180 days of ninth grade instruction. All required subject matter was covered using an eclectic array of materials and experiences.

Writing Strands was used for instruction during the first semester. Study Guides were used during her reading of the first two books in C.S. Lewis' Trilogy "Perelandra," "Out of the Silent Planet" and "That Hideous Strength." Of the eighteen books on her reading list [REDACTED] wrote 4 book reports. Having lived in Saudi Arabia I was intrigued by her report of Polk and Mares' *Passing Brave*. [REDACTED] is in the process of interviewing her grandfather in person and via the computer. To date she has completed a fascinating two and a half page account of his life. One of her compositions is about North Korea, the other "Putting Christ First: One teenage girl's struggle to freedom in Christ" is more creative writing than autobiography.

Apologia's *Exploring Creation with Biology* with labs was considered by [REDACTED] mother to be a very solid and well written biology course. She was fortunate to have her father, a neurobiology and computer science major, help her with 3 of the 4 dissections: a fish, frog, crayfish and earthworm.

Miller's "Algebra for the Clueless" supplemented the text *Algebra I Integrated Approach*. Mathematics is an integral part of [REDACTED]'s life as she doubles and triples recipes for family and large group meals. During the school year her time and money computation improved mightily.

[REDACTED]'s mother's plan for [REDACTED]'s World Cultures program is to cover three countries a year in depth for two years. This year India, Saudi Arabia and North Korea were the choices. She made a meal from each culture. She ate at the Nav Jivan Tea Room during their Indian week. Her 2500 word research paper with a bibliography of 3 books and an Atlas was written about North Korea from a missionary view point. It was a topic that obviously intrigued [REDACTED] as during this evaluation she animatedly discussed the books she had read.

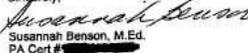
[REDACTED]'s strong academic interest is French. During this, her first year of language study she is nearing completion of The Rosetta Stone's Level I designed for more than one year of study.

Walking and riding the family exercise bicycle are the core activities of [REDACTED]'s physical education program. She rides a scooter. She plays basketball with her brothers and shoots baskets by herself. She played volleyball with other children.

Home Economics is a very practical area in [REDACTED]'s life. She likes to bake making different types of breads and rolls. She can now make her own dresses and completed 3 dresses this year. She improved her quilting skills and practiced her cake decorating skills. She frequently interacted with a baby, interviewed the mother and researched the normal development for a six month old.

I certify that [REDACTED] received ongoing instruction and an appropriate education.

Sincerely,


Susannah Benson, M.Ed.
PA Cert # [REDACTED]

XI. Questions

Question: Can I use a PHAA evaluator without complying with these requirements?

Answer: Yes. The only time member evaluators need to honor PHAA's requirements is when they fill out PHAA transcript forms. Evaluators are free to work with other diploma programs and transcripts, or do without transcripts at all if the family wishes.

Question: How do I find an evaluator associated with PHAA?

Answer: A current listing of *all* PHAA evaluators, many of them listed with email addresses, appears on the [PHAA website](#). Also, the PHAA online *Excelsior* newsletter, which is available to all members of the program, includes a listing of PHAA evaluators, often with evaluators' phone numbers.

Question: How do evaluators join PHAA?

Answer: They do so by mailing in the *Evaluator Application Form* on page 34. They are agreeing that when they sign PHAA transcripts they are doing so based upon PHAA's requirements. The membership fee for evaluators is \$10 per year.

Question: How do evaluators renew their membership?

Answer: They have two options: (1) They can do so [online](#) in the PHAA store, or (2) they can send in the *Evaluator Renewal Form* on page 33 and in the [PHAA online store](#).

Question: Can a student comply with the home education law without making progress toward graduation?

Answer: Yes. Compulsory education and graduation are different. It is not compulsory that students graduate.

Question: Where do I get a PHAA transcript form?

Answer: PHAA Evaluators with current memberships have access to the PHAA Transcript Program on the Private Evaluators' Website. The PHAA evaluator-member fills out the transcript for the family.

Question: Do I have to grade my children to fill out a PHAA transcript?

Answer: Yes. You and the evaluator have to agree to the grades and the evaluator fills them in on the PHAA transcript. Some families may use regular testing to compute grades, and other families may use a more holistic grading system that focuses on quality of completed projects, student attitude and initiative, and recognition of special achievements. Often students can be involved in self-assessment of their work during their evaluation meetings. If the Evaluator and Parent cannot agree on the grade, a "P" for "Pass" should be used.

Question: Is this diploma only available to homeschoolers in Pennsylvania?

Answer: Yes. Since this diploma is based upon PA law, homeschoolers must complete their entire senior year in a

Pennsylvania home education program to receive it.

Question: If I have already had my child drop out from compliance with the Pennsylvania home education law, can I have my child 'drop back in' so that he or she can receive the PHAA diploma?

Answer: Yes. Your child just has to *complete* his or her home education program, for a full senior year, in full compliance with Pennsylvania law. However, if a student has already dropped out, probably the best diploma option would be to consider the GED exam.

Question: Why not give diplomas to people who drop out from complying from the Pennsylvania home education law after a student is 16 or 17?

Answer: The legality of PHAA's diploma comes from a paragraph in the Pennsylvania Home Education Law which only applies to people who are complying with that law. The PA Dept of Education recently clarified this position, stating that their recognition of diplomas only extended to those in full compliance with the provisions of the Home Education Law—drop-outs from compliance do not qualify for our diploma.

Question: My son graduated from homeschooling last year. Can he now get the PHAA diploma now?

Answer: No. PHAA does not award diplomas after the fact.

Question: Our school district told us that we didn't need to get an evaluation done for our senior. We just took him in for achievement testing. Can he get a PHAA diploma?

Answer: No. In order to get a diploma in accordance with Pennsylvania law, such as the PHAA diploma, your son would have had to graduate from a Pennsylvania home education program that met the requirements of the law. Your school district did you a disservice by making up its own requirements.

Question: Can a student get an incomplete for his work at the time of the evaluation, but complete the requirements later?

Answer: Yes. A student can complete his requirements later, so long as they are completed before the start of the next school year. Completed work could be sent to the evaluator. It would not be necessary to have another meeting. Graduating seniors must complete all work before August 31 must submit the Diploma Request Form (on page 31 and in the [PHAA online store](#)) and signed transcript to PHAA by that date. The Diploma Request fee is doubled in August, so it is recommended that families send in the Diploma Request Form by July 31, with or without the outstanding paperwork.

Question: When should I join PHAA?

Answer: The best time to send in the Filing Form (on page 30 and in the [PHAA online store](#)) to join PHAA is when your child enters ninth grade. The \$45 filing fee is a one-time fee. Once you file you will be notified by email and given the password whenever a new issue of *The*

Excelsior, our quarterly online student newsletter, is published. Also, once you have filed, your evaluator can create a transcript for your student. PHAA will accept Filing Forms without financial penalty up until June 30 at the end of the senior year. If the Filing Form is sent in July after graduation, the fee is doubled. PHAA will no longer accept Filing Forms for seniors after July 31, after the end of the senior year.

Question: Can a student complete high school in less than four years and get the PHAA diploma?

Answer: No. The requirement for four years of English in Pennsylvania means that English must be taken for four separate years at the high school level. If the family wants their student to graduate in less time, they should look into one of the correspondence diploma programs (see page 21) which allow students to move through minimal courses as quickly as the student can. The GED is another alternative for an older student. Students cannot immediately start counting 180 days toward the next year once they have completed one year.

Question: Can a student get a PHAA diploma while attending college full time?

Answer: Yes. Several PHAA students have entered college after being homeschooled through their junior year. They can complete their high school requirements while completing their college requirements. Many colleges admit exceptional high school students early if they know that the student will get a high school diploma before college graduation. The PHAA diploma is awarded after the successful completion of a full freshman year. The family would still need to file a homeschool affidavit for that senior/freshman year, and have an evaluation with a PHAA evaluator.

Question: Can a student work *full* time on school days?

Answer: Not if a student is under 18, because that would violate child labor laws. Specifically, 14 and 15-year-olds may not work for more than 3 hours on a school day while 16 and 17-year-olds may not work for more than 28 hours during a five day school week. It is up to the supervisor (parent) to determine which days are school days. Homeschool students can work at a job during what are usually considered school hours, if their schooling is done at other times in that day.

Question: How do I register for a PHAA graduation ceremony?

Answer: Check our website and *The Excelsior* for info on graduation ceremony dates. Tickets can be purchased by mail or through the website.

Question: My son has been failing courses in a public, cyber-charter, or private school. Can he receive a PHAA diploma?

Answer: Probably not. The requirement for four years of English in high school means four years passing an English course each year. Similarly the requirements for three years

of math, science, and social studies means passing at least three separate years of courses in each of these areas. Also, we do not accept transfer credits unless a “C” or better grade was earned. You will probably want to look into one of the correspondence school diploma programs designed to give students a second chance, or the GED. The PHAA diploma was designed to provide a credential for homeschoolers, not a second chance for those who have been failing in a school.

Question: Does an English course taken at a college or school automatically meet PHAA’s English requirement?

Answer: No, but two college English courses during a single school year qualify, *if* the student also gives a speech. However, the reading, writing, speaking, and language study in any college course would contribute to meeting PHAA’s English requirement-- but the student would still need to read the equivalent of 25 books, meet our writing requirement, and give a speech. Students can satisfy PHAA’s course credit requirement for areas other than English through a single 3 or 4 credit college course, but not the PHAA requirement for English.

Question: Does passing a CLEP test automatically earn a student a PHAA credit in that subject?

Answer: As long as the student can verify that time was put into preparation for a CLEP exam (either hours or log entries), the student can earn credit for the course. Passing a CLEP exam (or in some cases, a series of related CLEP exams) with a strong score could also be the basis for an Honors designation for the course, as a student would have reached for a higher goal. The name of the CLEP exam and the score could be entered on the PHAA transcript form.

Question: I am a senior and only have one course requirement remaining. Would it be appropriate for me to take only English during my senior year?

Answer: Probably not. Many evaluators do not consider a curriculum consisting solely of English to be an appropriate education and find themselves unable to write an evaluation letter certifying that an appropriate education has taken place. If a student is considering college attendance they definitely want to do much more than just English in the senior year– or they can probably forget getting into a good college, as colleges consider a very strong senior year as being of utmost importance. Often students wanting to do only English do not plan on college, but instead plan to enter the work world. At minimum they should be getting a strong vocational credit related to their field, and they can also get elective credit in practical courses that will aid them in their work (computer literacy, office management), or more arts coursework or “just for fun” credits.

Question: Can I transfer from a school to PHAA in the middle of my senior year.

Answer: No. Our bylaws specify that transfer students from a school must complete their entire senior year (all 180 days) in a Pennsylvania Home Education Program.

Year's Work Checklist

Extra-Curricular Activities (optional)

Your evaluator will be interested in hearing about any extra-curricular activities that you have engaged in especially when you have shown leadership or have served the community. Please check any such extra-curricular activities below:

- Volunteer work (library, crisis pregnancy center, hospital, visiting nursing homes, etc.)
- Leadership in activities ((leading a class, helping with younger children at Sunday School, etc.)
- Entrepreneurial activities in your own business/ experiences in the work world.

English Course

In order to complete the minimum requirement for English, a student must meet all of the following each year:*

- Read 25 books *or* a literature anthology and 15 books *or* 10 books of the Bible and 15 books.
- Read at least 3 classics.
- Write at least 4 compositions.
- Write a composition that is at least 10 pages (2500 words) long.
- Keep rough drafts of your compositions which show that punctuation, usage, and/or grammatical errors were corrected in the process of writing these compositions *or* work through over 1/4 of a language or grammar textbook *or* log at least 45 daily entries of work in language and grammar study.
- Give at least one speech during the year to a group outside the immediate family.

Full Year's Courses

In order to get a full year's credit for a course you must do at least *one* of the alternatives. Check which ones apply:

Course Title:

- Over two-thirds of a textbook.
- 120 daily logged entries.
- 120 hours of logged study.
- 10 page (2500 word) research paper.**
- College course.
- AP course, College Board approved syllabus.
- Passed CLEP or similar test after preparatory work.

Course Title:

- Over two-thirds of a textbook.
- 120 daily logged entries.
- 120 hours of logged study.
- 10 page (2500 word) research paper.**
- College course.
- AP course, College Board approved syllabus.
- Passed CLEP or similar test after preparatory work.

Course Title:

- Over two-thirds of a textbook.
- 120 daily logged entries.
- 120 hours of logged study.
- 10 page (2500 word) research paper.**
- College course.
- AP course, College Board approved syllabus.
- Passed CLEP or similar test after preparatory work.

Course Title:

- Over two-thirds of a textbook.
- 120 daily logged entries.
- 120 hours of logged study.
- 10 page (2500 word) research paper.**
- College course.
- AP course, College Board approved syllabus.
- Passed CLEP or similar test after preparatory work.

Course Title:

- Over two-thirds of a textbook.
- 120 daily logged entries.
- 120 hours of logged study.
- 10 page (2500 word) research paper.**
- College course.
- AP course, College Board approved syllabus.
- Passed CLEP or similar test after preparatory work.

Course Title:

- Over two-thirds of a textbook.
- 120 daily logged entries.
- 120 hours of logged study.
- 10 page (2500 word) research paper.**
- College course.
- AP course, College Board approved syllabus.
- Passed CLEP or similar test after preparatory work.

Half Year's Courses

In order to get a half year's credit for a course you must do at least *one* of the following alternatives. Check which apply:

Course Title:

- Over one-third of a textbook.
- 60 daily logged entries.
- 60 hours of logged study.

Course Title:

- Over one-third of a textbook.
- 60 daily logged entries.
- 60 hours of logged study.

* Alternative English requirements are: (1) two College English courses plus a speech *or* (2) AP English course plus a speech

** Paper must include at least 3 non-encyclopedic references, demonstrate learning of a subject, and include a conclusion based upon student's own research.

(If a course title includes the word "Honors attach an explanation of the special honors received or the great initiative shown.)

Graduation Checklist

By the end of June of your senior year, you should be able to check off that you have completed all of the following if you want to receive a PHAA diploma:

Have you completed all of the required courses? (See the Required Courses Checklist below.)

Have you completed enough years of work in each subject area? (See the Subject Areas Checklist below.)

Did you have an evaluator who is qualified to accept credits for the PHAA diploma sign each year that he or she has accepted your credits on a PHAA transcript form? (See the PHAA website for a complete list of such evaluators.)

Did you comply with the PA home education law for the full 180 days during your senior year? (Your family must file an affidavit, get your program evaluated, and turn in the evaluator's report to the school superintendent.)

Did you send in the Filing Form to join PHAA? (You could send in the Filing Form as early as the spring before 9th grade. From then on, until graduation, your supervisor (parent) would be a member and you would get notified by email and given the password whenever a new issue of *The Excelsior*, our quarterly online student newsletter, is published. Filing forms postmarked during July after graduation pay double fees; after July they are no longer accepted)

If you attended a high school between 9th and 12th grades, did you ask the school to send PHAA an official copy of your transcript? You can only transfer credits if a "C" or better was received.

Did you send in the Diploma Request Form or submit the online form in the PHAA store? (When everything is done, send in the Diploma Request Form with the final PHAA transcript signed by the parent in 5 places and the student in 1 place. Diploma request forms postmarked during August after graduation pay double fees; after August they are no longer accepted.)

Required Courses Checklist

At least 1/2 year of each of these subjects must be completed between grades 7 and 12. Please *indicate a grade level* in which you completed each of the following. A subject could have been included in a course with a different title and could have been completed in more than one grade:

Geography

Civics

World history

History of the U. S. and Pennsylvania

General mathematics

Algebra

Geometry

Safety education including fire safety

Health and physiology

Physical education

Music

Art

Subject Areas Checklist

In order to graduate, you must complete at least the following number of years of each subject area while in grades 9 through 12. (The most that can be completed in any one year is one year.) How many years did you complete in each of these areas between grades 9 and 12. (Note: You cannot graduate with a PHAA diploma in less than 4 years.)?

Four years of English

Three years of mathematics

Three years of science

Three years of social studies

Two years of arts and humanities

PHAA *Mail-in* Filing Form

Alternatively, [click here](#) for the *Online Filing Form* to pay the fee by PayPal or Credit Card to get the PHAA Student Number needed for voting privileges, passwords, transcripts and graduation

I am the Supervisor of a Home Education Program in Pennsylvania, and have decided to join PHAA and open a file for my student at this time. I understand that, until my student graduates, I will be a PHAA member with voting privileges, my evaluator will be able to put together my student's transcript, and I will be notified by email and given the password whenever a new issue of *The Excelsior*, PHAA's quarterly online student newsletter, is published.

Enclosed are the following:

___ If the student attended a school between 9th and 12th grades, I have asked the school to send to PHAA official sealed copies his or her transcript.

___ Copies of evaluation letters for each year of high school at home so far, if any.

___ \$45 filing fee made payable to PHAA. Fee doubled if postmarked in July (after the student graduated).

Filing Forms are not accepted in August or after (after the student graduated; our students graduate in June or before).

I understand that PHAA will send the transcript (with evaluation letters attached) to a prospective college or employer if PHAA receive a request to do so signed by myself or my student and accompanied by a transcript fee or if either I or my student pays for such a request in the PHAA online store.

Student's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Student Email: _____

Supervisor's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Street Address: _____

Parent Email: _____

Town, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Current Grade Level: 9 10 11 12 (circle). Today's Date: _____ Expected Graduation Year: _____

<p>Mail to: PHAA c/o Rachel Hill, Executive Assistant 316 Farrar LN Saltsburg PA 15681</p>

Parent supervisors will receive a letter back from PHAA after submission of this Filing Form, giving their child's student number. Provide the student number to your evaluator so that he or she can fill out the online transcript form.

Give this number to your PHAA evaluator, for entry on the PHAA Transcript.

This is a one-time fee-- the next form needed to be filed is the **Diploma Request Form** and **Graduation Checklist**, in the late spring of the senior year, when all is ready for graduation.

PHAA *Mail-in* Diploma Request Form

Alternatively, [click here](#) for the *Online* Diploma Request Form to pay the fee by PayPal or Credit Card

Student's Name: _____ (as it will appear on diploma)

PA School District of Residence _____ (during senior year)

Enclosed are:

- ___ PHAA transcript properly signed. (Don't forget to sign just above your evaluator's signatures *and* at the bottom.)
- ___ Copies of high school level evaluation letters (that I have not previously sent in or posted by evaluator).
- ___ Graduation checklist (fill out bottom half of this page).
- ___ \$55 diploma fee if postmarked before August (\$110 if postmarked in August).

Mail to: PHAA c/o Rachel Hill, Executive Assistant 316 Farrar LN Saltsburg PA 15681

Check one of the following:

- ___ Send diploma to our home address. (Date on diploma will be the graduation date on transcript.)
- ___ We will be attending a PHAA Graduation ceremony: Western Eastern (You will get diploma at the ceremony.)

Compliance Verification:

The student has just completed his or her senior year in a Pennsylvania home education program. I verify that I have not received notice that a review for non-compliance for his or her home education program by the district of residence has been filed or that a due process hearing is pending (as provided by the PA Home Education Law), and that I will notify PHAA immediately if such contact occurs. I understand that PHAA cannot issue or honor a diploma for any student whose educational program is under review or pending a hearing for non-compliance until such time as the review is completed and the superintendent or hearing officer has determined that appropriate education has occurred.

Supervisor's Signature _____ Date _____

Graduation Checklist

Required Courses Checklist

At least 1/2 year of each of these subjects must be completed between grades 7 and 12. Please *indicate a grade level* in which you completed each of the following. A subject could have been included in a course with a different title and could have been completed in more than one grade:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ___ Geography | ___ Geometry |
| ___ Civics | ___ Safety education including fire safety |
| ___ World history | ___ Health and physiology |
| ___ History of the U. S. and Pennsylvania | ___ Physical education |
| ___ General mathematics | ___ Music |
| ___ Algebra | ___ Art |

Subject Areas Checklist

In order to graduate, you must complete at least the following number of years of each subject area while in grades 9 through 12. (The most that can be completed in any one year is one year.) How many years did you complete in each of these areas between grades 9 and 12. (Note: You cannot graduate with a PHAA diploma in less than 4 years.)?

- ___ Four years of English
- ___ Three years of mathematics
- ___ Three years of science
- ___ Three years of social studies
- ___ Two years of arts and humanities

Mail-in PHAA Transcript Request Form

Alternatively, [click here](#) for the *Online* (\$15 per transcript) form to pay the fee by PayPal or Credit Card

If you are a current student and the college or scholarship program wants your current transcript emailed to them, your evaluator can do that. If you are a graduate and/or want to snail-mail a sealed transcript to you or a college or an employer. Use this form or PHAA's *Online* form.

Mail to: PHAA
c/o Rachel Hill, Executive Assistant
316 Farrar LN
Saltsburg PA 15681

PHAA

Please send an official PHAA transcript to the following address(es):

1) _____

Optional:
Student ID# at this institution:

2) _____

Optional:
Student ID# at this institution:

3) _____

Optional:
Student ID# at this institution:

Student's name _____ Graduation Year: _____

Maiden name (if different) _____ Student/Diploma Number: _____

Student's Address _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

A \$10 fee is required for each transcript (ie, 3 transcripts on this form is \$30).

Total enclosed: _____

Student or Parent Signature (required)

Date

Make check payable to PHAA

PHAA Evaluator Renewal Form

Alternatively, [click here](#) for the Online Evaluator Renewal Form

I would like to renew my membership with PHAA as a member evaluator. Enclosed is a check or money order for \$10 payable to PHAA. In return for the \$10 dues, I understand that I will get:

- An email notice whenever PHAA's online student newsletter, *The Excelsior*, is published.
- A listing as a member evaluator in our newsletter and on our website.
- Ability to award PHAA credits to your evaluatees.
- Voting privileges at our membership meetings and on our written ballots.
- Access to the private PHAA Evaluators' Website (at www.phaa.org) where I can put together and edit student transcripts, participate in the evaluator's forum, get access to info for evaluators, post my biography for the public evaluator listing and even upload my photo for that listing.

The password-protected Evaluators' Website is especially useful. While you are a member, you can use it to:

- Create or update transcripts for your evaluatees.
- Advertise your services by posting or updating your bio in the website's *Evaluators Listing*.
- Post (or answer) questions that will go by email to all PHAA evaluators.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail address (optional): _____

Check Just One:

- Include my phone number in my *Excelsior* listing.
- Include my e-mail address in my *Excelsior* listing.
- Don't include either one in my *Excelsior* listing.

Which of the following do you want in your listing, check whichever apply:

- List me as a qualified Secondary evaluator (i.e. without prior permission of superintendent).
- List me as a qualified Elementary evaluator (i.e. without prior permission of superintendent).
- List me as an evaluator who can pre-approve for Handicapped (i.e. I have a PA special education teaching certificate or I am a licensed clinical or certified school psychologist).
- List me as an evaluator who offers Individual PIAT or Woodcock-Johnson testing
- List me as being willing to travel for evaluations.
- Only list me as being able to accept high school credits for PA Homeschoolers diplomas.

This membership is for the _____ school year.

My Signature:

Date Signed:

Sign carefully in black ink without overlapping typing. We will scan your signature for transcripts and diplomas.

Mail in this form with \$10 payable to PHAA

PHAA Evaluator Application Form

I have read your requirements and procedures as published in *Guide to PA Homeschoolers Diploma* (available as a free download at www.phaa.org) and I would like to join PHAA as a member evaluator. Enclosed is a check or money order for \$10 payable to PHAA. In return for the \$10 dues, I understand that I will get:

- An email notice including the link whenever our online student newsletter, *The Excelsior*, is published.
- A listing as a member evaluator in our newsletter and on our website.
- Ability to award PHAA credits to your evaluatees.
- Voting privileges at our membership meetings and on our written ballots.
- Access to the private PHAA Evaluators' Website (at www.phaa.org) where I can put together and edit student transcripts, participate in the evaluator's forum, get access to info for evaluators, post my biography for the public evaluator listing and even upload my photo for that listing.

The password-protected Evaluators' Website is especially useful. While you are a member, you can use it to:

- Create or update transcripts for your evaluatees.
- Advertise your services by posting or updating your bio in the website's *Evaluators Listing*.
- Post (or answer) questions that will go by email to all PHAA evaluators.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail address (optional): _____

Check Just One:

- Include my phone number in my *Excelsior* listing.
- Include my e-mail address in my *Excelsior* listing.
- Don't include either one in my *Excelsior* listing.

Which of the following do you want in your listing, check whichever apply:

- List me as a qualified Secondary evaluator (i.e. without prior permission of superintendent).
- List me as a qualified Elementary evaluator (i.e. without prior permission of superintendent).
- List me as an evaluator who can pre-approve for Handicapped (i.e. I have a PA special education teaching certificate or I am a licensed clinical or certified school psychologist.).
- List me as an evaluator who offers Individual PIAT or Woodcock-Johnson testing
- List me as being willing to travel for evaluations.
- Only list me as being able to accept high school credits for PA Homeschoolers diplomas.

This membership is for the _____ school year.

Yes I agree to abide by PHAA's requirements when I accept credits on PHAA transcript forms. I also understand that PHAA requires that I write narrative evaluation letters which highlight the excellence of the home education program. Enclosed is a copy of my PA teaching certificate, psychology license, or if I don't have a certificate or license, a resume showing my work experience.

My Signature:

Date Signed:

Sign carefully in black ink without overlapping typing. We will scan your signature for transcripts and diplomas.

Mail in this form with \$10 payable to PHAA

<p>Mail to: PHAA c/o Rachel Hill, Executive Assistant 316 Farrar LN Saltsburg PA 15681</p>
