

Navigating the High School Years

Begin Early

You are going to have to be your child's guidance counselor. There are home school mom's who have a background in school counseling that may be willing to help you with this area for a fee. Paying someone to help your child earn college scholarships could be a valuable investment. Be sure you know the credentials of the person or company you select to help in this area, or you or your child can be successful in this area if you start early enough and are willing to invest the time to learn it yourself.

A planning guide, found on the HEF website, can help you prepare your child for the college admission exams and scholarship beginning in the sixth grade. Go to www.flhef.org then click on HEF Library and look for National Merit Scholarships.

Career Planning

Florida Department of Education has developed an online counseling tool that is free to students called **FACTS.org**. This site offers many valuable tools for helping your child determine which career he/she might be best suited for. It provides incredible resources, in one place, to give your child guidance in regard to careers, college, scholarships, admission requirements and much more.

Your student can sign up to get a free ID number to use the resource. It is best to start using this resource as early as possible. Make sure your child is registered as early as 9th grade to begin using these resources.

Facts.org offers SIGI 3. This self-assessment provides students and adults in-depth and up-to-date career information which will give them a realistic view of the best educational and career options for their future success.

It contains a link to an online *Occupational Outlook Handbook* which gives information about hundreds of careers, such as:

- the training and education needed
- earnings
- expected job prospects
- what workers do on the job
- working conditions

It also provides Labor Market Information regarding occupational statistical programs, products, and services and Florida-specific information such as area employers, wages, employment statistics, patterns and projections, and even economic indicators.

There are other assessments regarding your child's strengths and weakness, likes and dislikes and personality assessments which would help them to determine the best suited to them. See the Appendix for some examples.

College Entrance Exams and Admissions:

Let your children take standardized tests beginning around the 4th grade to get them used to taking timed tests. It would be good if they could do this with other students, and with another teacher, to get used to the conditions under which they will be taking tests in high school.

The ACT website, under Improving Test Scores, has a list of recommended Critical Thinking Tests which help prepare your child to take the ACT test.

- [Scholastic Assessment Test \(SAT\)](#)
- [Stanford Achievement Test™\(SAT/9\)](#)
- [Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale Fourth Edition](#)
- [Otis-Lennon School Ability Test \(OLSAT-7\)](#)
- [Secondary School Admissions Test \(SSAT\)](#)
- [Terra Nova \(CTBS-5\)](#)
- [Woodcock-Johnson® Tests of Cognitive Ability \(WJ-R®\)](#)
- [Cognitive Abilities Test \(CogAT®\)](#)
- [Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children \(WISC-III\)](#)
- [Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test \(PPVT-R\)](#)
- [Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test \(NNAT\)](#)
- [Wide Range Achievement Test \(WRAT\) \(WRAT-3\)](#)
- [Cornell Critical Thinking Tests \(CTCT\)](#)
- [Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children \(K-ABC\)](#)
- [Metropolitan Achievement Test \(MAT 7/MAT 8\)](#)
- [Criterion Reference Test \(CRT\)](#)

Start using the practice tests for ACT/SAT in 8th grade, and let your child practice to see which tests they do best on and to get a feel for the way questions are framed on each of the tests.

Determine if your child is a good test taker so that you can decide whether to continue home educating under the law or enroll in a private school which allows parents to provide instruction. Having a transcript may qualify your child for a Bright Futures scholarship with a lower SAT/ACT score.

Some colleges accept both the ACT and SAT, but others require one or the other. Your child may score higher on one than the other. These tests can be taken more than one time.

PSAT/NMSQT®

The Preliminary SAT®/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) is a standardized test that gives students practice for the SAT Reasoning Test. It also gives your child a chance to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation's scholarship programs. It is a co-sponsored program by the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). The PSAT/NMSQT measures critical reading, math problem solving, and writing skills your child has developed over the years -- in school and out.

All students should take the PSAT/NMSQT in their sophomore and junior year. Juniors take the PSAT/NMSQT for entry into competitions for the scholarship programs conducted by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation and to prepare for the SAT.

Sophomores and younger students take the test to receive the personalized feedback on the academic skills necessary for college success when they have more time to develop these skills and to begin the college planning process

Depending on the school, the PSAT/NMSQT is administered on one of two days in October. To register, you or your child should contact a local public or independent high school. Call the school's main number and ask to be directed to whoever handles the PSAT/NMSQT arrangements. Most high schools should be accommodating. Be sure to do so well in advance of the mid-October test dates, preferably during the previous June. If the school seems resistant, you can search for another school in the area at <http://www.collegeboard.org>

This is a list of questions you should ask the school when registering:

- What day is the test being administered? (There are two possible PSAT/NMSQT test dates for schools. Find out which day the school has chosen.)
- What's the fee? Are there any additional costs? How can I apply for a fee waiver (if applicable)?
- Where is the test being held? In what classroom? How do I get to the school?
- What time is the test? When should I arrive?
- Who can I contact if I have any more questions?

The College Board makes fee waivers available to schools for juniors from low-income families who can't afford the test fee. Talk to the high school's guidance counselor for more information.

Students who take the PSAT/NMSQT their junior year are eligible to qualify for National Merit Scholarship Corporation's scholarship programs. There have been several instances when a home-schooled student was awarded a scholarship. Contact the National Merit Scholarship Corporation <http://www.nationalmerit.org/> for more information.

Home schoolers' scores are sent directly to their home. On the test day, when completing the basic information on the answer sheet, your child should be sure to enter your state's home school code in the "school code" section. The test supervisor will provide this for your child. Scores are usually available sometime in mid-December. PSAT/NMSQT scores indicate how ready your child is for college-level work and expected performance on the SAT Reasoning Test. The score report also offers information about test-taking skills and some details about your child's academic preparation.

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

The SAT® is a three-hour-and-forty-five-minute test that measures the critical thinking, mathematical reasoning, and writing skills that students need to do college-level work. It is one of the college admissions tests which may be required.

Information about the SAT, college admission process and for college scholarships can be found on the College Board website <http://www.collegeboard.org>

Do yourself and your child a favor by learning all you can as soon as you can. You can purchase the Official Study Guide for the SAT at this site. Or you can purchase an SAT prep book, such as the Barron's Guide to the SAT from a bookstore. These resources will contain practice tests and test taking tips. You can also obtain practice tests online.

An official SAT prep course is offered through the College Board at <https://satonlinecourse.collegeboard.com/loginAction.do>. You can also enroll your child in an SAT through the Florida Virtual School or a private business offering SAT prep. Costs vary from free at the FVS to as much as \$300 or more at a local SAT prep center.

Determine early if your child has a learning disability which would qualify him for accommodations on the SAT. The College Board website list types of tests that can be used to determine disabilities and the type of accommodations offered.

The SAT now includes higher level math skills, such as number operations, algebra and functions, geometry, statistics, probability and data analysis. There is also a section which requires students to write a short essay.

Most students take the SAT during their junior or senior year in high school. However, there are no age or grade restrictions for taking the test. At least half of all students take the SAT twice -- in the spring of junior year and in the fall of senior year. What's more, most students improve their scores the second time around. All scores are reported to colleges, but colleges generally look only at the highest scores.

The score report will contain critical reading and math scores, both on the 200-to-800 scale and a writing score from 2-12.

SAT Writing essays are scored by experienced high school teachers and college faculty members who primarily teach English, composition, or language arts courses, or who teach a course in another subject that requires a substantial amount of writing.

Readers will use the Scoring Guide in conjunction with sample essays selected for training. The Scoring Guide provides a consistent and coherent framework for differentiating between score points.

Each essay will be scored independently by two qualified readers on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest score. The combined score for both readers will range from 2 to 12. If the two readers' scores are more than one point apart, a third reader resolves the discrepancy. For examples, see http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep_one/essay/pracStart.html.

The multiple choice writing section counts for approximately 70% and the essay counts for approximately 30% of your total raw score, which is used to calculate your 200-to-800 score.

American College Testing (ACT)

Website: <http://www.actstudent.org/index.html>

The ACT is America's most widely accepted college entrance exam. It assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work. Most students find the ACT is a more straight forward test than the SAT.

The test is given 5-6 times each school year at a cost of \$29. That fee includes 4 score reports which be sent to the colleges of your choice. For homeschoolers, sealed score reports may also be sent directly to your home. You may send them, with college applications, transcripts, etc., but it is important that those reports remain sealed. Colleges will not accept opened reports.

The multiple-choice tests cover four skill areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science. The Writing Test, which is optional, measures skill in planning and writing a short essay. The ACT will also return the tests, along with the student's responses, to you so that you and your child can see exactly how he/she did.

Colleges generally accept both ACT and SAT
Buy a Guide to the ACT at local bookstore.

SAT II - Subject Area Tests:

SAT II exams are required by some state universities and private colleges. Subject Tests (formerly SAT II: Subject Tests) are designed to measure your knowledge and skills in particular subject areas, as well as your ability to apply that knowledge.

These tests demonstrate, to colleges, mastery of specific subjects like English, history, mathematics, science, and language. The tests are independent of any particular textbook or

method of instruction. The tests' content evolves to reflect current trends in high school curricula, but the types of questions change little from year to year.

Many colleges use the Subject Tests for admission, for course placement, and to advise students about course selection. Used in combination with other background information (high school record, scores from other tests like the SAT Reasoning Test, teacher recommendations, etc.), they provide a dependable measure of academic achievement and are a good predictor of future performance.

For the Class of 2006, SAT Subject Test requirements may change. After the January 2005 administration, the SAT Subject Test in Writing is no longer administered because the SAT Reasoning Test will include a writing section. This change has led some colleges and universities to change their admissions policies on SAT Subject Tests beginning with the class of 2006.

At the request of high school counselors and to help avoid any confusion over changing policies, College Boards has started a list of colleges' SAT Subject Test requirements or recommendations for the class of 2006. You can access that information at: <http://www.collegeboard.com/prof/counselors/apply/12.html>

Recommendation: Take SAT II Subject Area Tests after completion of the course at home since many colleges are now requiring these of home education students and unaccredited private school students.

CLEP Exams

CLEP, the College-Level Examination Program®, is the most widely accepted credit-by-examination program in the U.S. today, helping students of all ages earn college degrees faster by getting credit for what they already know. By receiving a satisfactory score, your child can earn from 3 to 12 college credits toward his college degree for each CLEP he takes, depending on the exam subject.

CLEP exams may be a better alternative to the SAT IIs, if a college will accept them in for admissions because, if a student receives a passing score, he/she will earn college credit. These exams are generally given at community colleges, colleges and universities.

Each exam is 90 minutes long, and, except for English Composition with Essay, is made up primarily of multiple-choice questions. Some exams have fill-ins. Tests are given in areas of business, science and mathematics, history and social sciences, composition and literature and foreign language. Most colleges accept CLEP tests, but you need to check with the specific colleges your child may wish to attend to see which tests they may accept.

With good planning and academic work, your child can reduce college costs and reduce the time it takes to graduate by taking CLEP® exams. Your child can be rewarded for what she has learned through independent study, advanced high school courses, noncredit adult courses, or professional development.

A friend of mine earned a degree from FSU using a combination of CLEP exams and Individual Directed Study. The program was set up in advance with the college, and she was able to study on her own, without attending classes, and take the exams as she prepared for them.

Advanced Placement Tests:

Outside the U.S., universities in more than 30 countries recognize AP in their admissions processes. Many US colleges and universities also accept AP credits. You can find more information about the Advanced Placement exams at:

<http://apps.collegeboard.com/apcreditpolicy/index.jsp>

Home education students can enroll in AP courses through the Florida Virtual School.

General Education Diploma

Valuable information on the GED at: <http://aceofflorida.org/ged/flares.html>

GED examinees passing the Official GED Tests will receive a State of Florida High School Diploma issued by the Florida Department of Education. In addition, each examinee receives a transcript of his/her scores.

Nearly all United States colleges and universities accept the State of Florida High School Diploma as a high school equivalency credential. GED Tests can not be used as a substitute for placement or admissions tests. GED candidates may apply for the military. Check with your local recruiter for more information.

The Commission on Educational Credit and Credentials recommends that postsecondary institution officials, employers, training program officials, licensing boards and all branches of the armed services accept the high school credential awarded on the basis of the results of the GED Tests in the same manner as they accept regular high school diplomas.

Grade point averages cannot be determined from GED Test Scores. However, GED percentile ranks can be viewed as approximately "class rank;" GED percentile rankings represent the GED graduate's performance related to the performance on the GED Tests of a representative group of graduating high school seniors.

Check with the specific College or University Admissions Office to see if the State of Florida High School Diploma will be accepted and to find out what other requirements there may be for admissions.

Florida Board of Governors

The Florida Board of Governors, as established in the Florida Constitution, now sets the minimum qualifications for admissions to state universities, rather than the Legislature. Each college may establish higher admission requirements. You need to contact the colleges you think your child is interested in to make sure you meet the requirements and determine which college admissions exams will be accepted.

Scholarships:

Bright Futures scholarships:

Home education students should apply near the end of the child's senior year.

Academic Scholars Award requires:

- registration with the district for grades 11 and 12,
- either a 1270 SAT or a 28 ACT test score, and
- 75 hours of community service.
(1) community service must be served outside of the home

- (2) a student cannot receive monetary compensation for community service
- (3) documentation must be provided on letterhead of the business or organization served

Florida Medallion Scholars award,

- registration with the district for grades 11 and 12 and
- either a 1070 SAT or a 23 ACT test score.

GED student can also qualify for a Bright Futures scholarship. Check the Bright Futures website for details.

Students must document all required courses for the Bright Futures. This can be done through dual enrollment course, Florida Virtual School, or other courses earned at accredited schools.

Other resources for scholarships:

- College Boards website - excellent tips for searching for scholarships.
- HEF website
- Books listing scholarships and how to apply: Bear's Guide to scholarships
- College Goal Sunday, Feb. 19th information to be found on FACTS.org to help students and families with Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

For more information visit: <http://firn.edu/doe/brfutures/home0072.htm>

Robert C. Byrd Scholarship

The Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship Program was established by the United States Congress to provide scholarships to outstanding high school graduates who show promise of continued academic achievement. This program is offered through the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA).

The U.S. Department of Education will establish the maximum annual award amount. The award may not exceed the cost of attendance at the institution when combined with other financial aid.

For more information about this scholarship visit the fldoe.org website
<http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00065/byrdfactsheet.htm>

High School Course Options:

Florida Virtual School

Offers SAT prep course, AP courses and regular high school courses. FVS courses are widely accepted in colleges and are free to all students in Florida. Visit the FVS website <http://www.flvs.net/> to learn about registration, course offerings and deadlines.

Dual Enrollment:

Dual enrollment is one of the articulated acceleration mechanisms offered to students in Florida. It allows high school students to earn high school and college credit at the same time. Home education students may participate in dual enrollment, early admissions, or career dual enrollment.

FACTS.org provides a list of approved college courses which are equivalent to courses required for a high school diploma. To find the list of dual enrollment equivalency courses go to www.facts.org click on Advising Manual, then Dual Enrollment Information or http://www.facts.org/pdf_sw/DE_Course_List_revised_01_05.pdf

Dual enrollment credits are accepted by some colleges, but not all. These courses will show a child's ability to do college-level work.

If you want to go the dual enrollment route, which seems to be good for students who do not score well on a single test, then completing an AA degree will better ensure that the credits will be accepted by other colleges and universities. Florida law requires a state university to accept a student who has earned an AA degree from a Florida community college.

Be sure to check with the college or university your child plans to attend to see how many dual enrollment courses they will accept and how it will affect the student's placement at the college. A student could lose some advantages or scholarships if he/she has too many college credits at certain universities or colleges.

Pitfalls to Avoid:

Not adequately preparing your child to take the SAT and ACT - it could mean scholarship dollars are lost.

Not having your child take the PSAT in the 11th grade by failing to notify the school district of your desire to take the test soon enough.

Not continuing to register your child with the Superintendent until age 18 or 19 - it will prevent the child from participation in extra-curricular activities, SAT, ACT and Bright Futures.

Letting your child take the GED too early and closing the door on dual enrollment or scholarship opportunities.

Registering your child with the school district as a home education student only in the 12th grade - Bright Futures Scholarship eligibility will be compromised.

Enrolling a student in dual enrollment who is not prepared or is not emotionally ready to face the challenges of a college environment.

Failing to recognize and diagnose a learning disability and getting help for the specific disability. If it is a diagnosed mild disability, additional time can be allowed for the SAT, ACT along with some other accommodations in college.

Waiting too late to determine your child's test taking ability by not allowing him/her to take some standardized tests prior to high school. You may want to consider a private school for high school rather than enrolling with the school district.

Assuming that all children need a college education and failing to find the child's interests or career options. Find direction while in high school in order to pursue opportunities, such as trade schools, government jobs, or private companies that have upward mobility (i.e. Publix, UPS, etc.)