

SPRING 2022

Tackling Tricky High School Issues

Think Outside the Box When It Comes to High School Coursework

Introduction

When you have a struggling learner, child with developmental disabilities, or twice exceptional (gifted with a learning disability), it is easy to feel uncertain and nervous about homeschooling through high school. One common concern is what will his coursework look like, especially when the student is not performing academically at the level of their age or grade placement.

Maybe you are concerned that your child, although bright, is “behind” in one or more academic areas. You can’t seem to wrap your head around the thought that while his math work is on a high school level, his English and writing—well, that is a different story! And if the teen is barely navigating through English grammar, how in the world will he be able to get foreign language credits in high school?

These are common scenarios and concerns, so please know that you are not alone! In this section, we hope to offer creative solutions for working around these challenges, as well as ideas for high school coursework that may suit your student’s unique needs.

Getting Creative

As you consider high school coursework, it is important to understand that most states do not mandate specific high school graduation requirements for homeschooled students. (To check your state’s high school graduation requirements, be sure to visit hsllda.org)

That being said, as the administrator of your child’s schooling, you are responsible for setting forth the graduation requirements based on each student’s functioning levels, capabilities, needs, and post-secondary plans and goals. When the student completes the course content and assignments you have set forth, he is graded. Upon completion, the course is recorded on the [high school transcript](#).

(As a side note, please know that HSLDA members are free to speak not only with our special needs consultants, but also our high school consultants. And we offer a wonderful transcript review service as part of your HSLDA membership! We have also created several sample special needs transcripts to help you get a better idea of what your student's transcript could look like.

For struggling students, we recommend that parents provide a high school program of a minimum of 20–22 credits over the course of 4–5 years (and possibly longer for students with severe needs). “What? Five years of high school?” you say. “We can do that?” YES!

Many high school students take a “gap” year to complete coursework, participate in career exploration and job trainings, do volunteer work, and travel. So, for special needs students, taking five years to complete a high school program is certainly reasonable.

MATH AND SCIENCE

When planning our student's homeschool high school education, we parents tend to rely primarily on our own high school experience. Then we draw upon the high school journeys of our friends' children and their traditional, public-school coursework.

But as homeschooling parents, we have much freedom and flexibility. We need to realize that high school coursework can truly be customized. If your student is very strong academically and plans on attending a four-year university, then his high school program may include several AP classes and be heavy with math and sciences (with labs). On the other hand, a student who plans on going to trade school or community colleges could have more general academic classes, may or may not have language credits, and may pursue more basic math credits in high school.

This freedom to customize can be particularly beneficial for students with special needs. While a bright student with dyslexia may not be able to handle the reading and writing load of a foreign language, he can opt instead to take American Sign Language, which is accepted as a foreign language by most colleges and universities.

Or let's consider a student with a math disability (dyscalculia) who may not be able to tackle calculus and trigonometry. This student may be able to manage Algebra 1–2 and geometry in addition to an accounting course. Other math options include Dave Ramsey's *Financial Peace Junior*—which could be utilized for a half-credit of high school math—or his DVD-driven *Foundations in Personal Finance for Homeschool* course.

For students with more severe disabilities, basic courses such as life skills math, consumer math, checkbook math, or a money management class may be the most appropriate.

Here are some more alternative math curriculum/courses to consider:

- Master Books' *Math Lessons for a Living Education*
- *Life of Fred* math series
- ShillerMath
- Math on the Level
- Switched-On Schoolhouse geometry
- Catchup Math
- Thinkwell
- *Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and Other Hands-On Learners*

Now let's turn to science. Traditionally, we think of high school science coursework comprising of biology, chemistry, physics, and perhaps geology. But remember that you have the freedom to design high school studies based upon your child's strengths and weaknesses, needs, interests and passions, as well as his or her post-secondary endeavors.

If you have a student who is "over the moon" at the idea of space exploration, then consider a high school astronomy class. Other options include marine biology or paleontology classes.

Standard science curriculum also comes in a variety of formats. [Timberdoodle.com](https://www.timberdoodle.com) offers DVD-driven biology and chemistry courses. [Apologia](https://www.apologia.com) offers online classes as well as MP3 versions of their science text. This is great way to make the high school content accessible for students who are not reading independently on grade level.

Also be sure to check out Master Books publishers for amazing resources, textbooks, and DVDs. Other options include *Introductory Horticulture* or *Exploring AgriScience* by Christian Light Education, who offers many great electives and creative courses.

READING AND LITERATURE

For a moment, let's address students who are dyslexic or, for various reasons, not reading on "grade level." Parents often ask, "How can I give my child high school credit for reading literature or text that is below high school level?"

We encourage families to help high school students access the material and content via [adaptive equipment and assistive technology](#). Such tools are creative ways to allow students to take in information, output what they know, and work more independently.

For high school English, while some struggling students or reluctant readers may not be able (or motivated) to read original Shakespeare, parent-teachers could design a Shakespeare class using alternative presentations. Parents could have the student watch some of Shakespeare's plays or obtain picture books and illustrated versions from the library to read and discuss.

Original works of classic literature are available as audio books via [BookShare](#) or [LibriVox](#). Maybe your student cannot independently read or comprehend Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, but could listen and follow along with an easier version, such as the *Bring the Classics to Life* series, or a graphic novel version, or a movie version to compare and contrast.

You could even create a literature survey course on “Classic Fairy Tales from Around the World,” such as the *Cinderella* story. Find various versions from various cultures, read them aloud, discuss, and then compare and contrast.

Here are some more curriculum options for English/Literature:

- Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW)
- Classical Academic Press's high school level, DVD-driven *Art of Poetry* course taught by Christine Perrin
- High Noon Books, which carries high-interest books written at easier readability levels
- Timberdoodle.com's *Complete Graphic Shakespeare Collection* or other graphic novels and resources
- Lightning Literature & Composition, available through Rainbow Resource
- The Book Umbrella available through [TeachersPayTeachers.com](#)

In closing, be encouraged that you can give your student an excellent and creative high school education! Please know that in order to help your struggling student through the high school content, you may have to offer him curricula or materials that are modified, written at easier readability levels, on audio, etc., in order to make the content accessible for him. *And that's okay.*

Be sure to keep a record in your homeschool file of the type of accommodations your student has been afforded in the educational setting, as well as testing accommodations such as extended time. Remember: With a little creativity and out-of-the-box thinking, you CAN do this!

Recommended Resources

- *Simply Classical: A Beautiful Education for Any Child* by Cheryl Swope, available at www.memoriapress.com
- *The Homeschooler's Guide to Portfolio and Transcripts* by Loretta Heuer
- *Teaching a Child with Special Needs at Home and at School* by Judith Munday
- *Teaching the Classics DVD Seminar and Workbook* by Andrew Pudewa
- *Linguistic Development Through Poetry* by Andrew Pudewa

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