



High School Diploma

What does a diploma mean?

In general, a diploma is a document certifying that the person named on the diploma has successfully completed a program of study. A high school diploma certifies that a student has successfully completed a program of secondary education.

Where do I get a diploma?

A blank [diploma](#) can be purchased from several organizations (including HSLDA) or possibly obtained via the internet (make sure copyright laws are not violated), but it is not valid until it is signed by the person who has verified that the student has finished the program that was set before him/her.

Can I make my own diploma?

Yes, but bear in mind a diploma that looks like it was prepared by an amateur may not make the desired impression. When creating a diploma, include at a minimum the following features: 1. State that it is a high school diploma. 2. State the name of the student. 3. Include wording that the student finished the program of secondary education that was required of him/her. 4. Enter the signature of the person who knows the student finished the program. 5. Add the date it was issued or signed.

Who must sign the diploma?

Because the diploma attests to the fact that the student finished his/her high school program, it should be signed by someone who exercised authority over the student's high school program and who has verified that the student successfully completed the program. In the case of a homeschooled student, the parent is generally the appropriate person to sign. If a school is issuing the diploma, a school official will sign it.

Can a parent sign a diploma even if he did not personally teach all the classes?

Yes. For a homeschooled student, the parent designs the student's high school program. Only the parent knows if the student truly accomplished what the parent required. Even if persons outside the family taught the student, the parent will still know if the student accomplished what was required in the class.

Can more than one person sign the diploma?

Yes. There may be several people equally qualified to sign the diploma—such as both parents, in the case of a homeschooler. Additionally, other persons can sign the diploma as witnesses to verify the fact that the diploma was issued, but this is not essential.

What if I homeschooled in close association with a private school?

In some states, parents have the option of homeschooling in close association with a private school. Under some circumstances, the private school may issue the diploma upon the student's satisfying all of its requirements.

Do I need an "accredited" diploma? If so, how do I get one? Some colleges and employers look down on a home school diploma (they want it to be state-certified).

The quick answer is, "No." However, there are certain schools and organizations that have received accreditation from an accrediting body and their diplomas are considered to be accredited. In order to obtain an accredited diploma, a student must complete graduation requirements from a school—whether it be via correspondence or on campus—that is accredited by a recognized accrediting organization. Public high schools are not necessarily accredited. Therefore, the diplomas they issue would not be accredited either. However, colleges and universities generally recognize these public high school diplomas *as if* they were issued by accredited organizations.

Even so, how do I get an "accredited" diploma?

There are organizations which, for a fee, offer to give homeschool students an "accredited" diploma upon completion of their program. In HSLDA's experience, most homeschool parents do not seek such an accredited diploma.

Can I obtain a high school diploma without involving the local school district?

Yes. As indicated above, you can obtain a commercialized diploma and fill out the information regarding your school and student's name.

Will the local public school issue a diploma for my student?

No. Even if you followed every homeschool law, the public high school does not owe your child a diploma.

Must the student comply with state or school district requirements in order to receive a diploma?

No.* It is up to each parent to decide what the student must do in order to receive a diploma. While each state has slightly different requirements for graduation from its public high schools, parents are not required to meet the same requirements that are imposed on public school students. For example, you may hear that 20 "credits" are required for graduation. While public schools may require students to complete 20 credits before being allowed to graduate, and may require that certain subjects be taken, homeschool parents are under no duty to imitate the public schools or adopt their standards.

*Note: The Pennsylvania homeschool law prescribes graduation requirements, but even though the student fulfills them, neither the school district nor the state will issue a diploma to the student. HSLDA encourages parents to issue the diploma and take the position that the state should recognize it, since the student has met the state-prescribed requirements.



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Do I need to get the local public school's approval before issuing a diploma?

No.* You, the parent, are the authority that issues the diploma.

Note: In North Dakota, the law says that the school district, an approved nonpublic school, or the North Dakota Division of Independent Study may issue a diploma to a student completing graduation requirements established by one of these entities or established by the state for all public and nonpublic schools, but these entities are not required to issue the diploma. Most homeschooling parents in North Dakota issue their own diplomas.

How do I get a diploma that is recognized by the armed forces?

The armed forces recognize a parent-issued diploma if the student received it for completing a program of education through high school at home. The military will require that the student provide a transcript demonstrating completion of high school to support the receipt of the high school diploma.

Should I skip the diploma and have my student take the GED test instead?

A GED is a substitute for a diploma; it is not a diploma. A person can obtain a GED without ever having spent a day of his life in school. Many colleges and employers will treat a GED about the same as they would a diploma. However, if a student has a GED, some colleges and employers may assume the student did not have what it takes to finish high school. If your student successfully completed a program of secondary education, he deserves a diploma to prove it.

What schools (i.e., correspondence and online) offer a diploma for homeschoolers?

A quick online search on Google.com asking for an "online high school diplomas for homeschoolers" produced many possibilities.

Diploma services/programs—can I homeschool without them? How effective are they?

You certainly can homeschool effectively without using a diploma service or a correspondence program. None of these programs existed when homeschooling began. Even though the pioneers of the homeschool movement didn't have any of these services or programs available to them, it has been verified that their children have done very well, both academically and socially. Their children have been accepted into colleges and universities based on homeschooling without any outside services or programs. However, these diploma services and academic programs have made recordkeeping easier and have given those contemplating homeschooling through high school much more confidence.

Should I also prepare a transcript?

Yes. You should prepare a formal statement listing each course your child took in grades 9 through 12, the amount of credits earned (as decided by the parent), and the letter grade or other evaluation earned (as decided by the parent). If a student may be headed for college, the transcript should be in a format designed to be quickly and easily understood by busy college admissions officials. Colleges vary in how many credits they want entering students to have in various subject areas. (And in some states, such as Indiana, certain admissions requirements are set by state statute.) Some employers also require high school transcripts along with the high school diploma. Transcripts can be downloaded on HSLDA's Homeschooling Thru High School website. For further information, see the transcript question and answer above.

After High School

College Admissions

How difficult is it for a homeschooler to gain admission to college?

It's getting easier every day! Many colleges are now familiar with homeschooling in general, and most of them have already admitted homeschooled students. Some colleges even have admissions officers who specifically review homeschooled students' applications. Record-keeping is important during the high school years so that you can provide admissions officers with an accurate account of the courses that your child has completed in high school. Most colleges require either SAT or ACT or CLT test scores for admission. Many helpful resources regarding [college admission](#) are available, as are [college prep](#) materials.

DISCLAIMER: The content of this website has been prepared for and is intended to provide information that may be useful to members of the Home School Legal Defense Association. The Association does not necessarily warrant this information. The reader must evaluate this information in light of the unique circumstances of any particular situation and must determine independently the applicability of this information thereto.

Policy regarding resources listed by our Homeschooling Thru High School program:

Being listed as a resource does not constitute an endorsement by HSLDA. Our list of resources is not intended to be an exhaustive inventory of all available materials, but rather a sample listing of resources commonly used by our members. HSLDA retains the exclusive right to determine which resources we will list. We will periodically update our list based on member feedback.

In general, resources listed must be of value to a substantial number of homeschoolers and cannot be overtly anti-Christian or anti-HSLDA.



<http://www.hslida.org/highschool/faq.asp#D11>

Victory Over College Discrimination

Over the past year, many families have contacted Home School Legal Defense Association concerning various roadblocks their home school graduates are facing in college. Baylor University in Texas, for example, decided at the last minute to deny entrance to six home school graduates, even though they all had been formally accepted and had scored high on their SAT exams.

One of these students was from an HSLDA member family. She already had her room reservations and travel plans set when she was notified that she could not enter the college because her home school diploma was not sufficient. HSLDA immediately went to work on her behalf, faxing letters and legal memorandums to Baylor's general counsel. Finally a truce was reached—although Baylor refused to change its policy, it agreed to allow this one-time exception.

In another case, Syracuse University in New York refused to give the son of an HSLDA member federal financial aid because he only had a homeschool diploma.

In a more widespread situation, the whole University of Maine system misinterpreted the law and declared that home school graduates could only be admitted if they had a diploma recognized by the state. Since only one state out of 50 even has a process for homeschoolers to obtain recognition of their diplomas, this absurd rule caused problems for homeschooled graduates across the nation.

New York's Jefferson Community College told the 15-year-old son of the Thomas family (name changed) he could not become a regular student nor receive financial aid since he only had a home school diploma. Initially, the college was going to admit the student and provide federal financial aid, but a U.S. Department of Education financial aid officer inaccurately informed the school that it could lose its institutional eligibility (disqualifying it for federal higher education aid).

Both Mountain Empire Community College and Strayer College in Virginia refused financial aid because the homeschooled graduates did not have GEDs.

The 1998 Higher Education Amendment

Fortunately, many other home school graduates found admissions an easier process, thanks to a 1998 amendment to the Higher Education Act allowing homeschoolers access to federal financial aid.

Prior to 1998, colleges were often confused as to what requirements applied to home schoolers. Working with former Chairman Bill Goodling of the House Education and Workforce Committee, HSLDA Senior Counsel Christopher Klicka drafted legislation specifying that a student "who completes a secondary education in a home school setting" is eligible for federal financial aid. Home schoolers no longer had to obtain a GED or take the federal "Ability to Benefit Test" in order to obtain federal money for college.

HSLDA also worked with House and Senate Education Committees and federal regulators to enable home school students to simply "self-certify" eligibility. There is no federal requirement that a home school graduate prove his diploma is state-recognized.

In addition, Klicka helped draft language to accompany the Higher Education Act, spelling out Congress's intent that requiring additional testing [GED or SAT II exams] of home school students . . . could reasonably be seen as discriminatory . . . The Committee believes that college admissions should be determined based on the academic ability of a student, not on the accreditation status of the school in which he or she received secondary education."

Colleges also receive federal money directly in the form of "Institutional Eligibility Funding." A college is only eligible for federal financial aid if it accepts students who have high school diplomas, GEDs, or are beyond the compulsory attendance age of the state in which the college is located. Since many 16- and 17-year-old homeschoolers who wanted to attend college were below the compulsory attendance age, they were not technically included in any of the listed options.

In 1998, this did not seem to be a problem. Once the law was passed, nearly 95% of colleges freely accepted homeschoolers based on admissions criteria supplied by HSLDA that did not include GED, an accredited diploma or the taking of SAT II exams.

Bureaucratic Mishap Throws Colleges into Confusion

In spite of the clarity of the law, bureaucrats in the U.S. Department of Education under former President Clinton issued a new student financial aid manual, the *Federal Student Handbook*, which was distributed to colleges at the beginning of the 2001 school year. In January 2002, HSLDA obtained a copy of this manual and determined that it is the source of today's confusion regarding aid for home school graduates.

The manual only recognizes a home school student as eligible for federal financial aid if "the student's home state recognizes their certificate as an equivalent of a high school diploma." This is inaccurate. The manual also stated, "Note, however, that



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these students must be above the age of compulsory attendance in order for your school to enroll them without jeopardizing its institutional eligibility." Also false.

Over the last several months, Chris Klicka had been working with the Department of Education and the House Education and Workforce Committee to obtain a comprehensive solution to these bureaucratic misinterpretations. HSLDA has requested three repairs:

Solution 1: Have the Department of Education Send a Clarifying Letter

First, HSLDA persuaded the Department of Education general counsel's office to draft a "guidance letter," which we received on April 19, 2002. All higher education institutions that receive federal funds must follow the letter, effective immediately. It states:

A home school student can be admitted to a post-secondary institution as a regular student without jeopardizing either the institution's eligibility to participate in federal student assistance programs or the students' eligibility to participate in such programs.

In essence, the inaccurate instructions in the *Federal Student Handbook* must be ignored.

Solution 2: Correct the Student Financial Aid Manual

Secondly the Department of Education promised that the *Federal Student Handbook* would be corrected. HSLDA has already helped draft language for the new edition and the Federal Rule Negotiating Committee for Higher Education has approved the proposed changes.

Solution 3: Pass a Technical Amendment to the Higher Education Act

Finally, HSLDA requested a technical amendment to the Higher Education Act further clarifying the law so that bureaucrats could not misinterpret it. The Department of Education's deputy counsel promised to personally assure colleges that they would not lose their institutional eligibility if they accepted homeschool students.

HSLDA continues to work with Congress to make these changes more permanent in the federal Higher Education Act. Some of these changes have already been added into House Bill 4854, which is expected to pass before the end of this session.

Light at the End of the Tunnel

We praise God for this long-awaited victory. HSLDA has already been able to resolve many of the situations described at the beginning of this article. HSLDA is also sending out a copy of the guidance letter to over 6,000 institutions of higher learning.

(See <http://www.hsllda.org/docs/news/hsllda/200204301.asp>.)

We urge any HSLDA members who experience trouble with federal financial aid or college admission to contact us so we can assist you.