

Record keeping for home schooling high school

-by Brenda Rishea, former OCHEC editor

Many parents are daunted by the necessity of keeping good high school records, but for the student who wishes to continue into post-secondary studies, record-keeping is essential. Not only does the parent have to keep accurate of all work that has been completed, but also an account of all extra-curricular activities. In Ontario public high schools, students must complete a minimum of 40 hours of community volunteer work with documented evidence in order to receive their high school leaving certificate.

Credits

It is important to record the credits or units that each class is worth. Try to calculate how many hours per course the student has spent in class, studying, and assignments, along with a scope and sequence outline of the course. The point is to be able to present these credits to an admissions department in a form that is easily understood by you and them. Most courses will try to cover at least 80% of material in the textbook. If the student completes about 80% of the textbook, and does some projects, exams, essays, etc. that reflect how much the student has learned, you can consider it as having achieved one credit. If the student has taken any courses outside the home, make sure you keep the transcript as well as the course calendar which will have a description of the course that can be presented to the admissions department. However, the best way to really know what is expected of your student from the admissions department is to contact them well in advance of the year the student expects to graduate, and ask them directly what they would like to see. If the student wishes to pursue studies in computer aided design, experience in home economics will not help much. Also, check with the college or university if they will consider your student if, in addition to their portfolio and transcript, they can take a standardised test such as the CAT, SAT, or ACT.

Standardised Tests

Find out whether the institution will accept the results from taking a standardised test, and which one. Preparing for the CAT, SAT, or ACT can be expensive or cheap. Private tutoring is available through Kaplan Inc., a subsidiary of the Washington Post Co., and serves about 160,000 students per year. A typical student pays \$800 (U.S.) for 36 hours of guided test practice, and anticipates improving their score by about 120 points (so they claim). Princeton Review (about 100,000 students and about the same cost) seems to be the second largest preparatory service with about the same advantage. The cheapest way to get tutoring is by borrowing the CD Rom at your local public library, which can always order the program for you if you request it. But claims to better scores via prepping can be misleading. Most students will do better the second time they write a test after having been coached. The more realistic point difference is closer to 25 to 40 points higher if coached. Scores also depend upon which test they write. Some tests focus on subject-matter and intelligence testing, and the mixtures vary from test type to type. The verbal test is more heavily weighted to reasoning skills while the math test measures recently acquired knowledge. It is easier to study for and remember factual knowledge than to use reasoning skills to solve a problem.

Volunteering Records

There are at least two ways to validate the student's volunteer work; in a booklet or letter. The booklet should have a place to write in the name of the company or organisation that the student is helping, the dates the help was performed, and how many hours. If the record is by letter, it should be on company letterhead, stating the student's name, the dates and number of hours worked.

One idea for community work is from the Ministry of Education's website: "...projects under the Alzheimer Intergenerational Volunteer Initiative". The projects are collaborations among local high schools, seniors' centres, seniors' residential facilities and local chapters of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario.

Each project is unique, reflecting the nature of the needs in the particular community. A project in St. Thomas, for example, is the building of memory boxes. Seniors who are well build and decorate wooden boxes in the craft room of a seniors' centre... Those seniors and young volunteers then work with friends and relatives of the Alzheimer senior to fill the box with items linking to past events in the Alzheimer senior's life. The young people and the

Alzheimer senior then take out the items, one by one, and discuss them, with the hope of triggering fond memories.” In the local community newspaper there is usually a column dedicated to listing areas where volunteers are needed in the community. The more obvious areas to serve others are in hospitals, seniors’ residences, walking neighbours’ dogs, escorting young public school students to and from the bus stop before and after school, libraries, day care centers, historical sites/museums, gymnasiums, city parks, recreation centers, special interest groups such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, and many more.

Portfolios

Maintain a portfolio of all projects, artwork, etc. in a properly presentable outer covering, such as a large, black, zippered artist’s portfolio with a built-in ring binder inside, or attach the loose papers with strong ribbon so the contents are together and in order. Or, if the student is creative, have him/her construct a cover out of durable, waterproof materials. Make sure the pages, photos, artwork, drawings, sketches, or letters of testimony are attached securely, are dated as to when the work was done, and are clean, neat, and presentable (and/or inside plastic cover sleeves). There’s nothing more dismaying than to present a portfolio covered with rain spatters, beverage stains, crumpled corners, or torn pages.

The Need for Vocational Training

In spite of the “big push” to get our children into higher education, the world still needs skilled labourers. It is the education sector that should be expanding, not higher education. We need missionaries, plumbers, plaster workers, woodworkers, child care services, chefs, mechanics, construction workers, roofers, cosmeticians, hairdressers, shoemakers, farmers, and the like. Some school boards, in an effort to cut costs, are choosing to close their vocational high schools, blending those students into the remaining high schools with room to take them, not being able to offer full service programs for these areas of need. Some community colleges have a specific focus that may not be broad enough. The European system of apprenticeship would be one good way to revive skills that will soon be lost altogether.

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