

# **Parents' Perspectives on Early College Entrance for Profoundly Gifted Children Part 2: Testing for Admittance and Choosing Enrollment Options**

by Beth Wright

When did you get that sinking feeling that your child was ready for his first college class? Was he 10, 8 maybe even 6? Perhaps you are facing this juncture right now.

Yep, it's official. He's not normal and your dreams of raising an easy, pleasantly gifted child will never be realized. You are not the only parent to find yourself struggling with questions such as, "can he really do the academic work of a college course, how will we pay for it now, will the local college think we are lunatics when we approach them with our small child in tow?"

Of course, research conclusively demonstrates the benefits of early college entrance for profoundly children. As a matter of fact, that research has been around for a long time. Miraca Gross, renowned gifted education authority, often writes and speaks of "...the evidence, from very many years of longitudinal research..." (Gross, 1999) Evidence proves these kids can do the work, they can fit in socially with young adults, they can thrive in a world of people twice, and sometimes three times their ages. So what are parents worried about?

Unfortunately, few college admissions officers are well versed in gifted education research. Some may have **no** experience with children like ours. Children with IQ scores of over 160 appear in the population at a ratio of fewer than 1 in 10,000 (Gross, 1999), so, realistically, how many kids like yours have crossed the admissions manager's path? If we are to find ways to meet the profoundly gifted child's intense need for appropriate academic stimulation, we may need to be willing pioneers in our own hometowns.

Many parents face these same hurdles as they help their profoundly gifted children attain their academic goals. This article is filled with the stories of real parents and their true-life experiences with early college entrance for their profoundly gifted children. All of the stories deal with the young child or adolescent in a nearby college or university, under the attentive management of a parent. Children enrolled in full time residential or special Early Entrance programs away from home may have experiences not highlighted by this article.

## **To Test Or Not To Test...**

Well, if your head isn't swimming now, it will be once you contemplate all the different testing that may be required for your child to enter college. It all seems so overwhelming at first, but before you pull your hair out, consider all of the options. You may need SAT-

I s, ACTs, standardized achievement tests, IQ tests, placement tests, or none of the above!

Maybe the stories of other parents will give you a frame-of-reference for testing options. The five themes in this section are: “charming” their way in, using standardized achievement tests, braving a placement test, taking the SAT-I, and avoiding testing completely.

- Will You Need Tests? These Kids May Sell Themselves!

Rose Marie agrees, “ It is true that these kids can sell themselves; our son met the president of the Rhode Island School of Design at a conference and was asked to come do a semester at his university, and he had no clue what Tom's test scores were (other than perhaps that he scored in 8th grade higher than the average college bound 12th grader on the SAT-I and had been admitted to a university at age 8, as that was mentioned in his biography for that conference, but I don't know if he read that or not). The president of MIT also requested a meeting with our son and did not know his test scores, but we didn't discuss his going to school there, I don't think - he more asked Tom questions like what equipment that MIT doesn't have should they have and what he would do differently if he were the president of MIT.”

We found Octavian completely capable of charming and impressing the dean of admissions when he interviewed with her. He simply let her see the real Octavian. At one point in their conversation, I remember thinking that he was so relaxed and affable that he even impressed me. She gave him the thumbs-up after a simple interview!

Beverly makes the point that some admissions directors may not be as open to the child on campus. Certainly, your experience will vary depending upon the admissions department’s opinion of gifted children attending college.

“The admissions director of the community college is on our side (some are not...) and adores Conner. She always comments that he is not only a ‘genius,’ but is charming! You want that attitude. Then they start thinking about how your child will enhance the school's image by going there. And believe me, they do look at that! I've had students on both campuses comment to me that Conner's being there

made them feel that their school was a cut above the rest as a result. They have all seen the latest T.V. specials on gifted kids in college and are surprised to find they have one on **their** campus!”

Helene Sue notes that it’s best to chat with your child’s teachers before signing them up for classes. “Sasha had a miserable experience with a chemistry teacher.

Sasha was the best student in the class and got an A but this was not an appropriate teacher for Sasha. She resented Sasha being in her class and made her life miserable. Of course, what backfired for the teacher was that the other students picked up instantly on her treatment of Sasha and the other students formed a buffer. This infuriated the teacher more. Sasha was well accepted in class and wound up tutoring a number of her fellow classmates. But it took its toll on my kid's earliest experiences with college."

Such words of caution should not go unheeded. Not all professors will be capable of overcoming their bias against children in college. Not all admissions directors are savvy to the abilities of highly gifted children, either. Some parents find the professors eager to work with their children and the admission department truculent, and some find it the other way around.

Helene Sue says, "They took one look at Sasha's application and insisted on an interview. He kept asking her why she wanted to go to their university. Sasha kept telling him that she really wanted to take Communications 105B and really wanted to study under that particular professor (who had personally invited Sasha to take her class). The admissions director kept trying to tell Sasha that at 13, she really wasn't ready for college, since there's so much more to college than academics."

Sheesh. At that point Sasha had been in college for over a year with all A's and B's. What more proof could they want of a child's readiness for college?

How do you navigate these waters? Perhaps you could approach the professor first to give him or her the opportunity to warm up the idea of your child, and then once you have his or her approval, approach admissions. Many parents find this is a workable solution to the problem of the shock factor that many in academia experience over their children's age. Of course, we turned this approach on its head and called the classical studies department chair to ask his permission for Octavian to attend his class and offered him the approval of the dean of admissions as an endorsement.

- **Wanted: Standardized Achievement Test Scores**

Standardized achievement tests are nationally normed instruments used by school districts and homeschoolers to assess the academic achievements of students. Some of the popular tests include Stanford Achievement Test, California Achievement Test (CAT/5), and Iowa Basic Test. The level of professionalism required for testers varies with each. The Stanford requires that the tester hold a four-year degree and the testing environment remain tightly controlled with specific parameters enforced. The Iowa loosens that rigidity somewhat, and the CAT/5 offers the greatest degree of freedoms by allowing anyone to administer their test, and without non-family member restrictions.

Most homeschooling parents use standardized achievement tests to help them assess their children's educational needs as well as provide proof of grade-level proficiency for their local school board. The CAT/5 allows a homeschooling mother to test her child throughout the year if she so desires and each time the scores are mailed directly to her. Such an instrument offers the mother complete control over the testing process. She can accommodate a test-shy child in the comfort of his home and take as many days as necessary to accomplish the task. While each section of the test is timed, any child with an IEP indicating learning disabilities may take the test un-timed.

This year we decided to use the CAT/5 for fun. Octavian wanted to try his hand at taking a standardized achievement test so that he could grade-skip to eleventh. He took the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> grade test. Later we decided not to utilize the opportunity to grade-skip in order to take advantage of dual enrollment status for as long as possible. But, we found the CAT/5 quick, efficient, and very easy. In fact, Octavian was surprised at how easy it was.

Beverly endorses the Stanford Achievement, “ The Stanford Achievement test is easy to get through Bob Jones University Press and you can administer it yourself if you test two unrelated children at the same time. I swapped with a friend and tested her child while she tested mine. The Stanford test is the most universally accepted. If they score in the 95% or above for their age level's grade, it is usually accepted as proof of giftedness.”

Many references are made in the gifted education literature to the fact that a standardized achievement test can be used as an out-of-level test in the same way that the SAT-I is used if the test is at least two grade levels above the student's current grade level. While not an IQ test, such a use of the test illuminates the student's superior abilities and may help you gain the confidence of an admissions officer.

- Conquering the Placement Test

When your ten-year-old decides to take Biology 101, without any previous science or higher math classes, will the college want him to take a placement test? That may depend on the college. Some parents find that in-house placement tests are the *entrée' du jour* for some colleges, especially when their children blow the tests away.

How can you ensure your child's success with the placement tests? Take into consideration his ease with testing and his personality. Will the college accommodate a student needing a private testing environment? Every college should have such accommodations and be willing to offer them. It is not uncommon for learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, sensory integration

dysfunction, and other problems to affect some highly gifted children. Requiring a quiet non-distracting testing environment for such children is reasonable. Such a request does not reflect badly on your child's ability to accomplish the academic rigors of college classes.

If your child is a slow test-taker, an un-timed placement test would be ideal. Some children need ample time to orient themselves to the environment, examine the test and its instructions and focus. Profoundly gifted children are notorious for being very careful, deliberate and perfectionistic. For some, this means **slow**. Again, asking for an un-timed version of a placement test does not cast dispersions on your child's intellect or his competency as a college student.

Peggy, the mom of 8 year-old Tristan, reports of their recent experience with placement tests, "It wasn't that bad! Yes, the receptionist gave us a **look**, and the admissions clerk gave us a seriously stern look, and we had to say 'Mr. X, the registrar, said...' But, the folks at the testing center were very nice. The exam wasn't timed (big blessing), and the room had windows so I could be where Tristan could see me. They said I was allowed to stay with him, but I didn't want there to be any chance of anyone questioning the validity of his test, so I stayed out."

It would seem the college went out of their way to accommodate young Tristan's needs. What a relief!

Peggy continued, "And he scored highly enough to qualify to take Chemistry 100! I didn't know if he would, since I don't know how '8th grade Algebra' compares to 'Intermediate Algebra'. I also wasn't sure how much of the college Algebra telecourse he watched at age five he would remember. So it is a relief to have that behind him. Now he has to jump through the hoop of a reading test. They only want a 10th grade level, though, so that won't be a problem."

Placement tests can wreak havoc with our confidence in our children's abilities. We know that they teach themselves material far beyond their years; yet, we wonder how that accomplishment translates into college level mastery of a subject. Such questions can drive us insane. How will they perform in a stressful environment? Or will they find it stressful?

Should they study for a placement test or take it cold? Will the dreaded "holes" show up?

"So far, he's only taken the math placement exam, which looked to be site-generated. He wasn't stressed at all, even with the strange setting and 'big' students coming and going (they do all types of testing in the one room). He didn't do anything to prepare. I did tell him the test was designed to go beyond what he knows, and that he needed to pass the 'Intermediate Algebra' section of it in order to qualify for the class (which he very much wants to do). If the test had

been timed, he likely would not have passed, as he spent an inordinate amount of time studying the directions for the test scanner printed on the answer sheet and he just is not speedy,” tells Peggy.

Once again, the profoundly gifted child’s unusual ability to rise to an academic challenge prevailed. Many parents have seen their children answer questions on material they have never previously encountered. I will never forget nine-year-old Octavian effortlessly working trigonometry and geometry questions on a take-at-home SAT-I test. He had never even had algebra!

Rose Marie says, “Before taking calculus, Tom did take a math placement test. He placed into calculus having had only algebra I under his belt. That was most surprising since we were told that over 10% of students with 700+ on the math section of the SAT-I and/or having taken calculus in high school and having passed the CLEP test for calculus credit actually do **not** pass the calculus placement test. Those unfortunate students are required to repeat pre-calculus.”

How do profoundly gifted children do that?

- The SAT-I And ACT...

Will your child need an SAT-I (not to be confused with the Stanford Achievement Test) or ACT score in order to take his first college class? Maybe, maybe not. After Octavian had been in class at William and Mary for several months, we approached our city’s small university again, hoping his college work would sway them. The admissions department insisted on an ACT score before they would be able to consider Octavian. Octavian was not comfortable with taking the SAT-Is or ACTs and we decided to wait.

Many of the young highly gifted children entering college early do not have SAT-I or ACT scores. There are so many ways to gain access to that first college class; SAT-I scores may never be an issue. Helene Sue explains, “Sasha has not taken the SAT-I or PSAT yet. She passed the CHSPE, making her the equivalent of a high school graduate as far as any institution in California is concerned. My rule of thumb is that my kid may never take any sort of test from which she derives no immediate benefit.”

Many unschoolers will echo Helene Sue’s sentiments. Your child’s school environment may shape the way that tests are viewed, both by yourselves and your child.

Beverly, who also homeschooled, found Conner very leery of taking tests to gain entrance to college. She found creative ways to avoid the need for tests in order to accommodate Conner’s concerns, “Once Conner proved himself in their classes, he officially "graduated" from high school and was enrolled in both the

community college and small private university under the title of ‘special’ student. He has not taken the SAT-I/ACT and will not take them. After earning over 27 credit hours Conner received full status at the local community college, and was then accepted as a transfer sophomore honors student at the state university. He never was asked to take any placement tests such as the ACT or SAT-I to ‘prove’ he could handle college level work. He already had proved himself to the universities through his actual performance.”

Some children love to take tests. Many highly gifted children are encouraged to take the SAT-I as an out-of-level test loosely measuring IQ. Jill tells of Peter’s experience with the SAT-I, “Peter took his first SAT-I when he was eight. He did it mostly because he thought it would be fun and interesting. It didn’t hurt during his first semester in high school to be able to show the principal that his scores were substantially higher at age 8 than the average of 18-year-old seniors at the high school.”

Often the SAT-I is seen as a fun, non-threatening way to measure the academic progress of the highly gifted. Taking the SAT-I at 8, then later at 10, then again at 12, certainly demonstrates the child’s acquisition of knowledge, skill, and cognitive maturity. For these extraordinary children, the SAT-I at 8 yields a score rivaling that of most high school seniors. As they mature their scores keep rising. Some parents treat the SAT-I as almost a lark since the scores do not become part of a child’s permanent record until they are 14, so, they take the SAT-I as often as they desire with no repercussions if the child has a “bad day.”

Jill saw a substantial rise in Peter’s score, “Peter took the SAT-I again when he was 12, because the university to which he was applying required it. He scored a very respectable 1430, which I am sure helped university officials understand that he was not an average 12-year-old. Peter has always enjoyed thinking through challenging problems, so taking the SAT-I was a couple of hours of concentrated fun for him. He was certainly much more relaxed than the teenagers taking the test!”

How do such young children gain access to a test normally reserved for much older high school students? The first order of business is getting a test registration packet. Any high school in your area will carry them in their guidance department. All you need do is call the guidance counselor and ask for one. Then go by the school and pick it up. No requirements of any kind.

Want to familiarize yourself with the SAT-I and check out the test dates? Go to <http://www.collegeboard.com/> for all the information you need. There is even a mini-test that your child can take free.

ETS, the company that owns and scores the SAT-I, provides a category for homeschooled students on its entry form. While it is not possible to register an underage student online, they do provide space for such accommodations on their

mail-in form. The process is quite simple. You merely fill out the registration, providing all the necessary information, pick your chosen test location and date, and mail it off!

The test results will be returned to you, the parent. The child may re-test as often as desired and the results will never be sent to anyone else for a child who is younger than 14. This makes them totally risk-free for children who enjoy taking them.

Some parents prefer to have their child take the SAT-I through talent search programs. Such programs offered by many institutions across the country reward high SAT-I scores with access to their special classes, summer workshops, and awards ceremonies. The United States has four regional talent searches, conducted through University of Denver, Duke University, Johns Hopkins University, and Northwestern University. Each state falls within a specific region and would accordingly use the program proscribed for that area.

Carolyn's daughter, Marie, has participated in talent search programs for years. Carolyn explains, "There are 4 regional talent searches that cover all 50 states, but there are various additional ones that overlap in specific areas, including the Belin-Blank talent search, C-MITES for young gifted Pennsylvania residents, and others. Also, at least at the 7th/8th grade SAT-I test level, once a child has taken the test, those scores may be used to participate in **any** of the regional Talent Searches, not just the one for the state you live in. The only 'catch' is that you have to actively seek out the information; it will not arrive in the mail with your local Talent Search opportunities."

See Carolyn's Hoagie's Gifted Pages website page for more information, [http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/talent\\_search.htm#tusa](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/talent_search.htm#tusa)

In order to qualify for the talent search, a student needs to score in the 90% or higher on a nationally normed standardized achievement test (the four talent search programs require different scores ranging from 90<sup>th</sup> to 97<sup>th</sup> percentile). These programs are designed to identify and offer enrichment to students working above grade level or those with ability to do so. Our children definitely fit the bill.

Whether the issue is navigating a college admission policy or finding a welcoming talent search program, parents of profoundly gifted children may need to don their detective's cap and prepare to do some research. If a program or institution does not meet your child's specific needs, don't be afraid to look elsewhere.

- How To Meet Testing Requirements Without Testing

One of the scariest aspects of early college enrollment for your child may be taking the placement tests or SAT-Is. Some children will feel not only test anxiety but also fear of failure at the prospect of such tests. Highly gifted children are acutely aware of the level of excellence they hope to attain in any endeavor, and taking tests is no different.

When Octavian was ten, I researched all the ways to gain college entrance for him. One of the seemingly unavoidable hurdles was testing. It appeared that tests were the only way to verify his ability to do college-level work. Octavian had never taken a test of any kind at that point and was very leery of taking one with such loaded stakes. We decided to forgo the tests, and since we knew of no tricks for avoiding them, we waited on college.

How can a profoundly gifted child get around placement and SAT-I tests?

Here is Beverly's story of how she pulled off such a clever switchback for Conner, "Conner got around it by splitting two programs; one at the community college and one at the local university. Conner first entered in the community college's 'rising senior' program (high school students who are gifted) at age 9 for dual credit (high school and college). But, that program had the restriction that he could not take their math or English courses without the tests. You could take their in-house test that would let them know where to place you, but Conner was very gun shy about tests of that sort at the time. So, I checked out the local private university that had a similar program, but it allowed him to take any area as long as it was just in the 100 - 200 level. Now, here it gets fun... Conner has completed College algebra and trigonometry and freshman English composition I at the local university and is transferring the credits back to the community college. Their rules say that he doesn't have to take the ACT/SAT-I or any other placement tests if he has taken college level math and English. Next, we will then turn around and petition the local university for a change in Conner's status from "special student" to full time sophomore because he will be applying as a full status transfer student from the community college."

Beverly's suggestions include:

- ✓ Get their handbook out and start reading the fine print for ALL options involved in admissions.
- ✓ If they require an ACT/SAT-I test and your child is not ready, see if they have the option of non-degree seeking student. They usually limit them to between 15 and 27 credit hours at that level- and usually (but check the fine print!) the credits will transfer easily either within the same school or to another one.
- ✓ Some schools only limit you without an ACT/SAT-I test to taking courses other than English or math.

- ✓ Some schools will let him take in-house placement exams if he really wants to take either subject but not go through with the ACT/SAT-I. If he does not do as well as he can, he will be placed in a developmental class; boring for him, but a foot in the door.
- ✓ Many ways to approach the problem...check out the student handbook and remember... you can leap forwards, sideways and backwards if you need to!”

### **Jumping Through All The Right Hoops...**

Ok, you're convinced of your child's competence, he picked the class he wants, you've identified the testing option everyone can live with, now you need to consider some of the enrollment status options that typically exist. Which one is best for your child? Do you homeschool or is your child in a traditional classroom?

Don't think circus tricks, think creativity. There are so many enrollment options and every state will offer a different variety. You will have to play a little Sherlock Holmes to find out what your state's statutes allow, what your local colleges say in their handbooks, and most importantly, what kind of loopholes exist within the college's beauracracy. Those loopholes do exist. You just have to ask the right questions of the right people and dig a little to find them.

Here are five of the things you need to consider: watch the grade skipping if you plan to use dual enrollment status, be aware of options other than full-time enrollment for the high school graduate, make a transcript that reflects **all** of your child's work, read about others' experiences with full-time enrollment, and finally, learn to take their “no” in stride!

- Don't “Skip” Out of Dual Enrollment Status:

For all of you parents thinking of radically accelerating your child right out of school, emancipating him or her, so to speak, think again. If you plan to ease them into college one class at a time, dual enrollment is the way to go. It may even be free. In some states, the community college classes taken as a high school junior or senior are paid for by the state. Many parents use dual enrollment at first, as it is the easiest and least formal method of gaining college credits for children.

“Our local community college's handbook only had a restriction as to what ‘grade’ the student was enrolled.” Said Beverly, “At the time, we listed Conner as a Senior in high school and enrolled him under their ‘dual enrollment’ category for gifted high school juniors and seniors. All I had to do is prove he was gifted since we homeschooled him. That I did with a ‘homebrewed’ complete transcript

listing every class he ever took at the high school level (54 semester hours by my count, 34 or 38 by the official transcript we got from Clonlara, a school that also offers distance enrollment to homeschoolers) which included complete course descriptions, his official transcripts from Stanford University's EPGY and Northwestern University's LetterLinks programs, as well as his Stanford Achievement scores and SB-LM score.”

How did this family fare when they approached the college? “They were taken aback when we approached them; it did take 5 months to find approval and they had to go all the way to the president's office for approval, but there was **nothing** in their student handbook that said a 9-year-old senior in high school (albeit homeschooled) could not enroll in classes,” said Beverly.

Other parents have used the dual enrollment status to their advantage as well. Since dually enrolled students are typically between the ages of 16 and 18, most colleges, it seems, will want proof of the child's giftedness. You may provide this proof by your child's school system's classification of your child as gifted, IQ test scores, an avalanche of homeschooling projects and advanced subjects studied, or even a personal interview with the dean of admissions.

When we approached the College of William and Mary about Octavian's first class, we were advised to make an appointment with the dean of admissions. We were told not to bring anything with us! No tests scores, no transcripts, no concrete proof of his high IQ? Unbelievable. Dr. Carey spent one hour chatting with Octavian about why he wanted to attend William and Mary, what classes he wanted to take, his homeschooling experiences, and many other subjects. He “interviewed” her, too, with lots of questions about the campus and the classes. She told him that he represented himself very well. Not only was she capable of determining his intellectual capabilities based on conversation alone, but she was enthusiastic about having him on campus. We were so pleasantly surprised. She was warm, friendly, and very savvy to the abilities of profoundly gifted students.

Kathleen had no problems getting Jeremiah into his first college class, “When Jeremiah decided to go to the local community college, the college just required a letter of dual enrollment from his counselor (he also had to be in a ‘gifted program’ to be allowed to do underage enrollment.) That was not hard to get. He walked out of the office with the form, got me to sign on the line and that was that.”

- He's Finished High School? Now What?

Since so many profoundly gifted children use dual enrollment status to gain access to college classes, are your options limited when your child graduates from high school extra early?

Not necessarily. Patti, tells of their family's recent success with enrolling Max in an astronomy class at a local community college, "We walked into the college today, and registered Max. There was nothing they could say or do. They have a non-discrimination by age clause and they require a high school diploma and transcripts. We are sooooo glad we put up with all the ups and downs of getting this diploma..."

Working hard for that graduation was worth more to Max and his family than just a sheepskin. Patti tells, "Max was thrilled to be at his graduation ceremony. He held back an ear-to-ear grin, trying to be more reserved. It, by far, has been the most exciting experience of his life."

"Graduation itself is an accomplishment. Doing so at an early age gave him a double thrill. We are very excited that he experienced it all. He had the option of receiving his diploma in the mail and not pushing himself to finish by deadline for the ceremony. The choice to finish at such a young age was his. He felt very important giving his speech even though he could barely see over the podium. It made him feel as though others were taking him seriously and realizing his accomplishments," adds Patti.

Indeed they were. Max and his parents were the subjects of a rash of major news articles, and the profoundly gifted child's desire to excel beyond society's normal standards was on display. While even few educators understand the perfectionistic drive of profoundly gifted children, articles like those about Max's accomplishment may inure the public and academia to the **normal** behavioral characteristics of the highly gifted.

Max used an independent study program and worked up to 12 hours a day, six days a week for months to graduate so early. Homeschoolers, especially less structured ones, will often find themselves without any formal documentation of their child's accomplishment. How do families fare without the extra security of a real diploma? Beverly found that her creativity kept her in good stead when it came to finding ways to get homeschool graduate, Conner, into the local university.

Beverly offers this sage advise about working the system, "Never tell the admissions department that you're going to try to go around them; they would never understand. You need to research your approach to enroll your child on your own to discover 'how' you can help the admissions department 'fill in the boxes' on their forms for your child who definitely doesn't 'fit' any boxes at all! Get a copy of the handbooks for the local community colleges and universities in your area. Look under 'admissions categories' and 'requirements for special admissions.'"

"Never approach the admissions department straight on," she continued. "From the beginning Conner was never unclassified---the universities and colleges

around here all had the same classification system. At the private university Conner was under the title ‘Special Student’ because he had technically graduated from high school (I had to provide them the transcript which included complete course descriptions.), but had not yet completed all the necessary requirements for a regular admission. But, this was only a temporary situation soon to change.”

- How To Make Your Child’s Transcript:

High school transcripts are documents designed to demonstrate the subjects accomplished by the student. Transcripts assign a specific number of points to each completed high school class or semester for every year the student is in high school. High school transcripts never include courses taken in middle school. So, how do you document your profoundly gifted child’s work when he may have been “officially” in the first grade when he accomplished the work?

Rose Marie says, “The only transcript the university got from our son was a 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade transcript (bet they loved that!). But he did have a rather long ‘resume’ of accomplishments and activities including essay contest awards from big name companies, volunteer work awards, and state fundraiser awards for years, paid work, paid business trips, extracurricular stuff he had been involved in for years (such as meeting the Clintons at a White House reception on the first day in 2000) and more.”

Indeed. Our kids will present transcripts that look unlike anything the university admissions department is accustomed to receiving. How do we prepare documents that effectively demonstrate our children’s accomplishments?

I turned to several popular books designed for homeschoolers preparing for college. While much of their advice was targeted to the older child, it was very useful for the organization of the subjects and such. One of those titles, *The Homeschooler’s Guide to Portfolios and Transcripts*, by Loretta Heur M.Ed., offers this sage advice for beginners, “Before you get down to the brass tacks of writing your curriculum, acquire a copy of a high school course selection handbook. This should be a public document available through your state’s Department of Education, your Superintendent’s office, or your local high school’s guidance department.”

As you prepare your child’s transcript, keep in mind the type of subjects offered by the local high school. These are the types of courses you should highlight. If you have one of those kids who obsessed over one subject for three years (we do!), it may be a little tricky to show the level of work he accomplished. Perhaps you can break down those three years into several subjects and show them as separate entities. My son’s study of ancient Rome really incorporates a good bit of generalized world civilizations studies and I would note that as a separate course from the Roman History. His extensive readings in the subject of Roman and

Greek mythology also qualify as a separate subject as he spent as much time reading those as he would have if he had been taking a college class on the subject. The year he spent 10 hours a day reading physics books? Physics, and AP, at that! The year he spirited away my husband's college chemistry textbook, reading it all day, every day, memorizing the periodic table of elements and working chemistry problems for fun? AP Chemistry for sure! See how easy it is to fill up a transcript?

Beverly made Conner's transcript with the help of Cafi Cohen's book, *And What About College: How Homeschooling Leads to the Best Colleges and Universities*.

She tells, "I took every course Conner had done at the high school level and wrote a complete course description of it to include in the transcript. In the case of courses done through Stanford's EPGY and Northwestern's LetterLinks' program, I just had to copy down the course description they provided when we first enrolled in the classes. The same was done for the college classes he took. I listed all special camps, with a brief description of what the camp was about and how many hours Conner attended. The camps were similar to attending workshops and conferences, so credit was given here, too."

"I included any special awards Conner had earned, as well as any publications of his work. An admissions committee should note them. Theatrical performances, musical recitals, clubs/ organizations, and special interests were all noted in his transcript as well. Finally, I also included a reading list in the transcript. This was a list of all high school level reading Conner had done (much of it through the Junior Great Books Program we did for his English credits)." Beverly adds.

Cohen says that it is not uncommon for homeschoolers to have transcripts boasting 50 or more credits and Conner's homebrewed transcript was no exception. His transcript looked both professional and impressive. Yet, Beverly's friend suggested Conner might need a transcript or diploma from an accredited school in order to gain entrance into a state university. Where would a homeschooler get such a diploma after almost finishing high school?

Beverly says, "Clonlara School was gracious enough to accept Conner as a senior student. Clonlara is an actual school that also does distance education for mainly unschooling homeschoolers- they have guidelines for you to follow, but let you decide what activities you will accomplish to fulfill those guidelines and requirements. We sent his homebrewed transcript to them and they looked at what guidelines they fit. All the work we had been doing actually was more than they required and they noted that on Conner's transcript. The only down side to the 'official' transcript from Clonlara is that there was not a section for all those 'extras' to be noted: performances, awards, publications, camps, special interests, etc. But, it was in the same form as all other high schools' transcripts and thus, more readily acceptable. We did use the Clonlara transcript when Conner recently

transferred as a college sophomore to the large state university without any problems.”

How much did Beverly have to pay for the Clonlara transcript? She says, “The fee charged by Clonlara was fairly hefty (over \$1,400), but then, we were asking for Conner to be enrolled at the end of his high school career. To make sure we were legitimate, they needed a great deal of documentation, and rightly so.”

Like all unschoolers, I love options and Cafi Cohen offers an endless variety in her wonderful book, *Homeschooler’s College Admissions Handbook*. She writes, “Fortunately, there is no One Right Way to write a homeschool transcript—or any transcript, for that matter. Examine transcripts from your relatives, friends, and family to see what I mean. From small private schools to large public schools to charter schools to homeschools, transcripts assume an incredible variety of forms. They use different grading systems—or no grading system. They report academics by semesters or, more simply, by completion date. Some look professional. Others—including some from large, well-known high schools--use a bare-bones format.”

I made a transcript for Octavian, and wow, it was fun and easy. Since we have always used portfolios for yearly homeschooling evaluations, all I had to do was go through them to verify his work, book titles, textbooks used, projects, awards and anything else I wanted to include. The college preparation advice I found in *Gifted Children at Home* reminded me to include my son’s jewelry business on the transcript, even though he developed it when he was only 7!

I used the advice offered in Cohen’s book about rewarding credit for subjects studied unconventionally, and managed to come up with a whopping 67 credits! I was excited about using this transcript in August, when we met the admissions officer at the local community college (the one that turned him away three years ago due to his age) to attempt to secure his admission there as a part time student. I’m learning!

- Full-Time Enrollment:

Full time college enrollment may be a process fraught with complexities, or it may be as simple as a classification change made in the registrar’s office.

Perhaps the colleges and universities with the most savvy regarding our kids are those having faced child-students before. Certainly Octavian benefits from the fact that other young students have and do attend William and Mary. Their admissions department is comfortable with children and adolescents on campus.

But, what happens when the university in your hometown has never admitted a twelve-year-old before?

Jill tells her poignant story of Peter's recent acceptance, "Peter applied to a university with rigorous academic standards and requested their 'Early Decision, Single Choice' option. (He had just turned 12, had no desire to live away from home, and this university is not only strong in Peter's favorite subjects but also is located two miles from our home.) Peter's admissions materials showed that he did not have sufficient credits for a high school diploma, but had made top scores on AP exams in Computer Science, Calculus BC, Physics C, and Chemistry, had earned a mix of A's and B's in the four years since he began taking upper-level high school classes at age eight, and had scored 700-M, 730-V on the SAT-I.

He should have had a response by 12-15-2000, but heard nothing. We called and located the specific admissions officer who had Peter's application. He said he wanted to talk to a few people. A month later, we called again and were given an appointment to meet with him. He met Peter once, asked a couple of questions, but mostly told Peter about other students he had met. Finally, in mid-March, Peter received a letter of admission stating that he would begin as a full-time student in the fall of 2001."

He was in, but that was only the beginning of the fun! Jill found that the admissions department struggled to view Peter as any other student and couldn't seem to get around the fact that he was only 12.

"After the decision had been made to admit Peter, the admissions officer mentioned that a Dean at the university had appointed a committee to determine what was in Peter's best interests, and that this committee might decide that Peter should take only a part-time schedule of classes, or might decide that Peter should take another high school English class, but he wasn't sure just what the committee was empowered to do," continued Jill.

This waffling seemed to represent the fact that the admissions departments of most universities are skilled at dealing with normal 18-year-olds, not profoundly gifted children. According to Mary-Elaine Jacobsen in *The Gifted Adult*, the highly gifted are marked by the following abilities: "adaptability essential to creativity; multiple areas of expertise; ability to grasp concepts on diverse levels; advanced original thinking; unorthodox innovation; perseverance and endurance in the face of adversity..." Comparing Peter to the average incoming freshman seems absurd in the light of his inherent ability to master material with much less exposure necessary than that needed by the average incoming college freshman.

Jill was faced with convincing the admissions officer that more high school for Peter would be detrimental, part time college would leave him bored, and in order for him to secure financial scholarships, he would need to enroll full-time. She was also faced with the nerve-wracking prospect of waiting on the special committee to convene and make their decision. This delay seriously hindered her

ability to procure Peter's scholarship money and correspondence advising the admissions officer of the need for timeliness was ignored.

"I heard nothing more about the committee for a couple of months. Peter continued to attend occasional Physics Colloquiums on campus and to talk to the professors he met there. Peter decided what classes he wanted to take in the fall, and I sent an e-mail to one of the Deans about Peter's choices. In response, I received an e-mail stating, '...an advisory group has been assembled to assist Peter with his academic choices and progress at the university...' and that he should not be talking with professors about classes, but only with the committee; however, the committee did not plan to meet for several months," tells Jill.

The committee finally met, consisting of the dean, his supervisor, two professors, (none of whom had ever met Peter) and one professor who had met Peter several times. They invited Jill and Peter to meet with the Dean two weeks later, where Peter was asked to wait outside while his mother was advised of the committee's decision.

Ultimately, the committee approved Peter's full-time schedule, with modifications. Their specific recommendations reflected their ignorance of Peter's abilities and character. Jill tells of their concerns, "They don't want him to take the freshman core courses, which is OK, because Peter had to work hard to find one that looked even mildly interesting. Their reason was that he lacked the 'life experience' to be appropriately involved in a small discussion group. Hah! The result was OK, but their reasoning was insulting and incorrect."

In spite of their negative experience with the admissions department of this large university, they remain impressed with the faculty. Jill says that Peter found the professors interested in him; they discussed many issues with him and expressed eagerness to have him as a student.

- When a College Says "NO": Are Minimum Age Requirements Legal?

When Octavian turned ten, he was reading college science textbooks and teaching himself algebra. After casting about unsuccessfully for an academic venue that would meet his needs, I turned to our local community college. I called them to inquire about their admissions process. They offered math and science classes perfect for challenging Octavian. I was eager to enroll him. I was crushed to find that they would not consider him due to his age. The admissions department told me that they were following a state law disallowing students under the age of sixteen. Incredulous, I called the State Department of Community Colleges and they repeated the same unbelievable thing.

Now I know that there is so much more to this picture than the child's age. Many parents of profoundly gifted children find colleges and universities more than

accommodating if certain criteria is met. For some, the criteria is a high school diploma, for others it is a letter from their child's principal verifying the child's giftedness and giving permission for the student to attend college concurrently.

Carolyn, whose Hoagies' Gifted Education Pages, [www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org), have been used by parents all over the world since 1997, reports her recent experience with a state university in her area, "I just called the local college. Seems they have a policy in place for non-matriculated students coming from the high school for college courses. They accept them. All they need is the signature of the high school principal. Period. Wow! I really didn't expect this part to be this easy! Of course, they have no idea that she's 10. But she meets their requirements, and has the signature of the high school principal..."

While attending her daughter's Talent Search Awards Ceremony, Carolyn read in the program that the local private college also accepts gifted younger students with a similar letter, and offers single-course scholarships to 7th and 8th graders they select, who are local to their college.

Carolyn calls the principal's signature, "magical," and tells of another child whose mother did not find the application process quite as easy. She tells, "Another parent in the area contacted the same woman in the admissions department. Her son has completed 8th grade, and he is 11. He comes from a private school that ends at 8th. Same woman, same state university, same department which is chartered to handle our kids and the returning older students. She gave the mom all sorts of run-around (they didn't have his SAT-I scores yet - he scored 730 math, 600 verbal - I think they may change their tune!). So without that magic high school principal's signature, it is not nearly as easy to get in..."

How many parents, like us, don't know that there are many ways to approach the application process and simply give up? We did. For three years we limped along trying to keep our son stimulated and challenged. He met weekly with a physicist at Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility and then, later, with a math and science tutor. Had we known that he really could attend college, we would have been thrilled to sign him up and watch him blossom.

When I began writing this article my first question was, "is age discrimination legal?" I still vividly remember the outrage I felt when I was told (erroneously) about my state's policy concerning minimum age requirement for admittance to community colleges. Recently I asked Wenda, a mother of three highly gifted children who is also a lawyer, what the scoop was on the legality of age discrimination by colleges and universities across the country.

She offered this link, <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/regs/34cfr110.html#S2>, for the Federal law which gives each state the right to make its own policy regarding age-based admittance.

What this means is that when you call your local college's admissions department you need to be aware of the hidden loopholes that exist for profoundly gifted children to gain admission. They exist. Wenda offered these suggestions, "I've gotten my 'ins' in community colleges in two different states by making telephone calls and asking the precisely worded question 'What is the policy for admitting people who don't have a high school diploma?'"

"Notice I didn't say, '**children**' and I didn't say, 'don't **yet** have a high school diploma,'" Wenda continued.

"When someone I called couldn't answer my question without asking **me** questions, I thanked them and then called other people until I found someone who understood the needs of exceptionally and profoundly gifted children. It's not fun talking to people who don't understand. Those people either (1) think you're crazy and grossly overestimate your children's abilities or (2) think your children are freaks. The community college 'ins' I managed to find were solidified instantly when I revealed my children's SAT-I and ACT scores, which were far above the average for each of the colleges," said Wenda.

There are so many loopholes in the applications procedure that the list goes on and on. Beverly recommends reading the institution's admissions materials carefully to find the option that suits your child. She says, "Check the official student handbook. Go over it like a lawyer would---very carefully, looking for relationships in logic in their admissions requirements (i.e. at our community college, you must take the ACT/SAT-I in order to have full status and take their English and math courses unless you have taken an English and math course at the college level elsewhere. Conner took both at the local private university where he also had a 'special' status. We transfer those credits to the community college, and Conner's status is changed to full-time)."

Beverly further recommends, "Check your state's law books yourself. Call your state senators and representatives. If it is true, it should be changed. If it is not, go back armed with the student handbook and a pleasant attitude and speak directly with the Director of Admissions. The Director here is on our side after initially being a bit hesitant. But, she fell in love with Conner and now makes a point of seeking him out periodically to talk with him."

Of course, you may be the unlucky parent living in a state with archaic statutes regarding age restrictions in community colleges. Jill found herself in just such an unenviable position, "When Peter was 9 and wanted to take a computer class at the local community college, permission was denied. We went as far as the state capitol, but received consistent refusals based on the fact that the community colleges were aimed primarily at adult education and could receive funding **ONLY** for students who were at least 16 years old. They refused to consider anyone younger for any reason, since the magic age was the condition of receiving funding. Three years later, there is a bill in the state legislature to

remove the age requirement in community colleges; unfortunately, it comes at a time when Peter is beyond anything the community college could teach him.”

Late this summer, I called the admissions department of our local community college to find out what documentation was needed to enroll him there as a part time student.

The admissions officer encouraged me to come to the college bearing CAT/5, transcript, and our letter of approval to homeschool (from the school board) to enroll my son under their dual enrollment classification. When we got there all of the admissions officers were mystified. Who had told me they would accept my son? They cited a state policy precluding the admission of students under the age of 16 for all Virginia community colleges. They insisted that they could make no exceptions, as this age policy was “an agreement between the Virginia Community College System and the Department of Education.”

How did I convince them to give us an appointment with the admissions manager for special admittance consideration?

**I did my homework.** I did not assume that the college admissions officers and assistants were right. Here are the steps I took to educate myself:

- I looked up the websites (using an internet search engine) for the Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Community College System (VCCS), State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), and the 2001 Virginia General Assembly.
- I read all documents, laws (code), policies and statements pertaining to education and community colleges, looking specifically for any mention of the colleges’ rights to set their own admission standards.
- I printed the documents I found that contradicted the assertions of the admissions officers.
- I called the VCCS and found a person able to confirm my understanding of the statements I had found in their 54-page policy manual.
- I called Virginia Home Educators Association (VHEA) to discuss my findings, ask advice, and get a little validation.

I was thrilled to find from my research that not only do we have the right to request the college’s consideration of our son, but many young homeschooling students attend community colleges in Virginia. In fact, other previously resistant community colleges across the state now serve students as young as 11 years old.

At the time of this writing, we await the decision of the admissions manager and the dean of instruction. We can only hope they will give us a chance. If they do, perhaps the college's experience with Octavian will open their doors to other students like him. I can only hope we are paving the way for Octavian's brother and sister, and the countless other gifted and homeschooled children who need community college classes in this area.

### **We Are Our Children's Best Advocates**

With all of the diverse college stories contained in this article, what major theme do I hope to convey?

#### **Enrolling your profoundly gifted child in college can be done!**

Many parents have accomplished the task and many will follow. All find their constant role is that of advocate. No one will pull as hard for your child as you will. It may be an uphill battle and you may need to go back to the drawing board many times in order to find a way to get around the college's initial reaction to your child. Just remember that your options are not limited. Don't give up after one "no."

When Octavian was ten we were told "no" by a community college. We sought answers from those as high as the state department responsible for the laws governing our community colleges. Everyone told us "no." In despair, we quit, believing that there were no routes to "yes."

This spring we were told "no" by the local small university when we approached them about Octavian taking one class. Again, we tried everything we could think of to convince them of his ability to perform, to no avail.

Now, thanks to some of the tips found in this article, Octavian is not only attending William and Mary, but may also be accepted at both of the institutions that initially told us "no."

If we can meet our goal of college enrollment, then so can you. This article is only a starting-point. Join a chat group for the parents of profoundly gifted children and ask lots of questions! (<http://www.tagfam.org>, click on "mailing lists") Find out that you are not alone.

Then, go for it!

**Author's Note:** This article contains the actual experiences of real parents of profoundly gifted children across the country. Names of minors have been changed to protect their privacy.

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