

Middle School Academics

- Most academically-inclined middle school students have accumulated some high school credits by the end of 8th grade. The most common are two years of a foreign language, one or two math courses (Algebra 1 and/or Geometry), and one or two science courses (Earth/Space, Biology). Other options are HOPE (physical education), and elective courses like Journalism or Intro to Computers that satisfy the Fine/ Practical Arts graduation requirement.
- Trinity currently offers Spanish or Latin 1, Algebra 1, and HOPE.
- Homeschoolers' options include courses taught in the community by established teachers or tutors, classes taught by parents, and FLVS for these subjects. Most brick and mortar high schools are not inclined to accept credits other than those listed above taught by public middle schools, unless they are from an accredited source.
- There are required End-Of-Course (EOC) exams for Algebra 1 and Biology. Algebra must be passed to take a subsequent math course; Biology must just be taken to go on in science at public schools. While private schools don't require them, if you ever want to switch to a public school, you can't register for math or science courses unless they've been taken. They aren't difficult to pass. You make arrangements with your zoned middle school to take them. Frequently, you receive a letter from the Home Education office in January, offering you the opportunity of help to sign up for them.
- There is limited space in brick and mortar school schedules - most offer 6 periods, while a few offer a 7th, mostly for fine arts, which leaves a total of 24 or 28 slots. The more courses taken in middle school, the more slots in high school available for more advanced courses. Advanced courses in high school are an opportunity to reduce the time spent at college (and related cost), allow space for a minor or double major, and/or allow the student to take a lighter college course load each semester so they can work or make it easier to keep their grades up.
- The distinction between Honors and non-honors is important to the student's grade point average (see Facts and Figures).
- One little-known rule: earning or being enrolled in a total of more than 6 high school credits by 8th grade disqualifies you from the spelling bee.
- If you plan to utilize FLVS for any high school courses, signing your student up for a middle school course in an area they enjoy might be helpful. It gives them a chance to become familiar with how FLVS works, and you to see how well they respond to an online environment.
- If your goal is to accomplish two years of a foreign language in middle school, some organized exposure as early as 5th grade might be helpful. In 6th grade, consider doing half of the first year of the language in a non-graded environment, and finishing it in 7th, either the same way or by going through a full-year program like FLVS's first year of the language.

FLVS/Online

- There are two components of FLVS - regular FLVS and Leon County FLVS. If you choose Leon County FLVS, you will be taught by a Leon County teacher and the state money associated with your enrollment will go to LCS. Experiences with the Leon County version of FLVS have ranged from good to poor; it might be wise to talk with other parents before choosing that option for your student.
- Georgia Virtual School offers a few AP courses that FLVS does not, including music theory and calculus-based physics. They operate on a different system (specified assignments are due every other Friday at midnight), with specified start and end dates. It is somewhat expensive - \$450 per course. It is accredited, and brick-and-mortar schools have no trouble with it; however, it will not work for Bright Futures (but you most likely won't need that particular class to satisfy BF requirements).
- There are other online providers that families have used in the past for various purposes. These include Homeschool Connections, Angelicum Academy, and Kolbe Academy. Seton and Our Lady of Victory are accredited, which was more important before homeschooling went mainstream. There are many, many more - ask other families what they liked and didn't.

Brick-and-mortar high schools

- Both private and public schools accept high school credits and grades earned at home in middle school, based on their official policy. In most cases, these are "validated" by subsequent school performance in the related area, usually after the first semester. If your child does comparably in their courses, there is no problem - if you gave them an A in Algebra 1 Honors, and they receive an A or B in geometry at school, that grade and credit is considered validated. If their grades are substantially lower, then generally they would discuss the situation with you. This almost never happens.
- Be aware of what time school starts, and that students need to be there 10 minutes before to get organized for the day. Most public schools begin at 7:30; John Paul II starts at 8. At public schools, the last class ends at 1:45; the optional 7th period at some schools goes from 1:50 to 2:50. Sports practices at Leon generally begin at 3:30; students spend the intervening time in the media center where they can do homework or socialize. JP II is similar - school ends at 3, with an hour designated for club meetings, study hall, or weight training; sports practices begin at 4.
- Boys' team sports at public high schools may limit participation through tryouts; it's good to know if that may impact your student beforehand. This may happen with other sports, but it's less common. Expect to pay to belong to sports teams (as much as \$3-400 per season), and drive your student to events as buses aren't provided. JP II is similar - a donation of \$100 per sport to the Booster Club is required, with per student and per family maximums, and parents provide transportation. No tryouts are required there for teams.
- It isn't required that your student begin at a brick-and-mortar school in 9th grade - some families have waited until 10th or 11th grade to send their students. Doing 9th grade at home can be a wonderful option.
- For Bright Futures, your child must be in the same place for both 11th and 12th grade - either registered with the county as a homeschooler, or registered in a brick and

mortar school. If you choose to do high school partially at home, keep up to date with EOC exam rules for other classes. They exist for Geometry, Algebra II and US History (but there is nothing at this moment that says anything but Algebra 1 has to be “passed”, just “taken”).

- You can preview history textbooks, and try to match some of the reading with Church History reading to ensure that they are getting the whole picture of history. When possible, request a Christian history teacher for the students to keep them from getting anti-Christian sentiments in the classroom.
- Volunteer for as many extra-curricular activities as possible to get to know the other students and their families with whom your students spend so much time.
- Consider getting your students to take HOPE online before entering high school. It can be a hard class to fit into schedules, and brick-and-mortar courses can have objectionable content. One strategy to employ for the portion of the HOPE class that focuses on 'sexual health' is to complete that portion for the student then teach them the same material from a Catholic perspective.
- Consider taking first year Spanish credit before going to high school to avoid Spanish I, especially if you speak it at home.

John Paul II

- The placement test for John Paul II is offered a few times on Saturdays in the spring, beginning with the last Saturday in January. They use the HSPT; study books are available. The exam can serve as your annual evaluation for the year it's taken. They are mainly concerned that any learning disabilities or special needs can be met by the school - there isn't an achievement level needed to be admitted.
- Everyone who wants to be considered for financial aid needs to apply through the state Step Up for Students program first. New families can apply beginning in early spring - be aware of when the application opens. Even if your income is too high, you still must apply through Step Up before receiving other aid. The application does require a certain amount of documentation and effort - it might be help to be familiar with those requirements before the application opens. <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/for-parents/>
- The Step Up program has changed for 2016-7, so families can receive partial scholarships. A family with 4 children can earn up to \$7,000 per month to be eligible for the partial scholarship of \$2800; the number is higher for larger families. Scholarships are first come, first served, so be prepared to apply. You can sign up at the link above to be emailed when the application opens.
- There is an application fee at JP II, which increases as time goes on. Be aware of the deadlines for lower fees. A large portion of the application fee can be waived in cases of financial need.

Public/Noncatholic Private Schools

- If you are zoned for Chiles, which is over capacity, you can apply to attend another school. The information is under “School Choice” on the Leon County website. The

applications open in December and January, and deadlines are important. Montford is also included in this category. Leon and Lincoln are generally under capacity. You can't move between under capacity schools.

- Encourage your students to attend FCA (Federation of Christian Athletes) every week to get to know other Christians at their school. It is also a great way to know which faculty are Christians as well.
- At the beginning of every year, send a form into the attendance office listing all holy days of obligation (and some that are not) so that the students have automatic excused absences to attend Ash Wednesday mass, Good Friday stations, etc. Many times sporting events prevent them from attending mass in the evenings on Holy Days.
- Get to know the Assistant Principal of Curriculum BEFORE you have an issue to discuss. Ask them to add some classic literature to the summer reading list to increase the choices of good literature on the school's list.
- As soon as there is a problem in a classroom with something like inappropriate content or viewpoint-based grading, contact the teacher and begin working out a solution in person if possible. Involve the principal if needed in a personal meeting as well.

Testing

- Consider having your child tested with a full Iowa or California Achievement Test after 5th grade. If they do well, there is a program called the Duke Talent Identification Program based on test scores done for 6th grade that allows them to take the SAT for experience in January of 7th grade. The score isn't valid for college admissions, but can help them know what to expect. Part of their goal is to convince you to sign up for expensive programs - but you can ignore that.

<https://tip.duke.edu/node/44>

- Nancy Vanstone in Gadsden County does administer the complete test (nvanston@yahoo.com); there are preparation books to help familiarize students with what they will see. The one for the Iowa is Scoring High on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (after 4th grade, you probably need the teacher manual as well). Rainbow has them:

<http://www.rainbowresource.com/prodlist.php?subject=1&category=46>

- Knowing where your child falls in percentiles on the full Iowa or CAT tests in late elementary/ middle school can be useful to help predict their ACT/SAT scores. If their percentiles are different from the percentile of the median scores at colleges they're likely to consider, it can let you know they will need a relatively stronger high school GPA and resume, and might want to begin test practice and preparation early.

ACT percentiles: <http://www.actstudent.org/scores/norms.html>

SAT percentiles: http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/highered/ra/sat/SATPercentileRanks.pdf

- If you're interested in having your child take the PSAT, contact your zoned public high school guidance office in the spring before the test is administered in October. It's common to take it for practice as a sophomore, and even as a freshman - but the

National Merit Scholarship program uses the score from October of the junior year. The school isn't required to allow you to take it. JPII may also be an option if contacted in the spring of the previous year.

- Signing up for the ACT and SAT the first time can take an hour. Deadlines for regular fees are usually a month before the test date, but sign up as early as you can. Test centers fill up, and you may have to drive 45 minutes to neighboring counties for a test that requires you to be there before at 8 on a Saturday.
- ACT and SAT tests are not offered over the summer. The last ones are generally the first two Saturdays in June, and the first ones in the fall are late September and early October. Be sure you know college application due dates, and give yourself enough time to take the exam, get the results (4 weeks later), and know if you need to study the summer after junior year to bring your score up on the early fall test dates before applications are due.
- Students usually do better on either the ACT or SAT. Having them take both, and then choosing one to concentrate on improving is usually a good strategy. For most students, the ACT has traditionally produced better scores; but if your student is especially strong in math, it may be the SAT.
- Consider having your student set up a secondary email address to give to the testing services. Colleges obtain student addresses from testing agencies (you generally give consent somewhere in the myriad registration materials), and it's not uncommon to receive a dozen emails a day.

Dual Enrollment/AP

- Signing up for dual enrollment at TCC or FSU requires a fair amount of work, including standardized test scores. It often has deadlines far in advance of the semester you wish to enroll. Start checking a year in advance to plan out the process. FSU's fall deadline is in March; they also require you to have a meningitis vaccine. TCC's general process is here:
<https://www.tcc.fl.edu/Future/TypeOfStudent/Pages/Information%20for%20Dual%20Enrollment%20Students.aspx>
- If your student is taking lots of dual enrollment classes, it can be very important they DON'T earn an AA degree while still in high school. This sometimes makes them ineligible for freshman financial aid. They will still get credit toward their college degree for their dual enrollment classes whether they have an AA or not.
- Be aware of how many high school credits each dual enrollment class carries. Science and math are generally one high school credit per semester, but sometimes less; social science and English are generally one-half credit per semester (but ENC1101 and 1102 are a full credit). This information is in the Course Code Table (facts and figures section).
- If you are dual enrolling, careful choices can eliminate many college general education requirements during high school. Check these at schools your student may consider attending. Most out of state colleges accept TCC credits without difficulty for their core courses.

- FLVS students taking AP courses make arrangements in the fall with their zoned public high school to take the actual AP exams, which occur during the first two weeks of May. The exams are free for FLVS students.
- Even though the course numbers are the same, the actual content and difficulty of some courses at TCC and FSU are quite different. If your student is planning to attend a 4-year university, taking foundational courses for their major at TCC may not be a good idea because they can't be retaken at a 4-year school. Future engineers and physical science majors might want to avoid math and physics, because the TCC courses are not comparable to their 4-year counterparts, making subsequent courses at the 4-year school more difficult. Consider using the AP program instead, where students have the option of accepting credit at the college level, rather than being required to.
- First semester 4-year-college calculus generally has more content than AP Calculus AB (and second semester much more than Calculus BC). At FSU, 91% of students who come in with credit from Calculus AB and start their math with second semester calculus FAIL. When engineering programs recommend all students start the calculus series over, this is why. On the other hand, if your student won't need more than one semester of calculus, having it over with early at a relatively easier pace can be very helpful - check the requirements for majors they're considering.

Bright Futures (more info under Facts and Figures)

- Meeting the required standardized test scores is not always easy. An ACT of 29 is in the 92nd percentile; a 27 is the 87th, and a 26 (see below) is 83rd. A SAT of 1290 is in the 88th percentile; 1220 is 79th; and 1170 (see below) is 74th. Many seniors take them many times before they get these scores.
- Transcripts for homeschooled high school students become a factor if you would like to use a lower ACT/SAT score to obtain (only) a Medallion Scholarship. If you can document a weighted GPA of 3.0 in their specified college preparatory curriculum, then your student needs only a 26/1170, a much more reachable target. Bright Futures accepts grade documentation for homeschoolers from only 4 sources: public and registered private schools, FLVS, and dual enrollment. Parent generated grades do not count, even for classes like Terri Hall's.
- However, if your child earned credits in middle or high school this way, and subsequently attends a brick-and-mortar high school, the high school will accept those credits and grades, and put them on the high school's official transcript. This will make them acceptable to Bright Futures.

Service Hours - Bright Futures and other

- 100 service hours are required for Academic Bright Futures; 75 for Medallion.
- Homeschool students must have the service hours needed for Bright Futures documented in the manner prescribed by the student's home county school district. Proof of each service endeavor has to be documented in writing on the organization's letterhead, and signed by an official of the organization.

- Leon requires a separate essay for every volunteer experience regardless of the number of hours. JPIL requires one essay from underclassmen, and two from upperclassmen as part of religion class. Every summer, have your students get together their volunteer forms and write all their essays.
- Altar serving, or participating as a singer, musician, or Eucharistic Minister at Mass does not count toward Bright Futures hours, although it can be used on things like scholarship applications. Public schools don't accept anything "proselytizing", so helping at Vacation Bible School doesn't count for them (although it does for JPIL).
- Most students who will be applying for outside scholarships have far more service hours than the minimum.

College Applications/Scholarships

- Florida public universities have EARLY application deadlines. FSU's is October 15, and UF's is November 1. Even though applications can be turned in later, the schools highly recommend you meet the early deadline to maximize your chances of admission. It also gives the school an option to defer a decision, rather than issue an outright rejection which is their only option later in the process. Make a chart of deadlines for every school your student wants to apply to to stay on track.
- Essay prompts are generally available as early as July 1; applications open August 1 or August 15. Get as much of it done as possible in the summer, before senior year starts. Looking at the essay prompts while the applications are open in the fall of junior year can help students understand the types of questions they'll need to be prepared to answer, and maybe identify some activities they want to engage in the summer before senior year.
- UF requires a great deal of extra testing if you were homeschooled for high school without using a significant amount of FLVS or dual enrollment credit:
<http://www.admissions.ufl.edu/ugrad/frqualify.html>
- UWF requires a statement from a homeschooled student's county saying graduation requirements were met, which could be a problem if your student didn't take PE:
<http://catalog.uwf.edu/undergraduate/admissions/freshmenadmissions/>
- Applications generally ask for lists of activities and awards. Start keeping a list of those for your student beginning in 7th grade, so you don't have to go back and try to remember.
- Check Alabama and Texas schools to see what grades and test scores are needed out of state tuition waivers - it may be worth applying there. Students usually need to particular GPAs to keep the waivers.
- Scholarship applications almost always require 1-3 recommendation letters. Identify teachers and coaches who are likely to be good sources of these early (and make a point of being especially helpful and friendly to them long before you need to ask).
- Many public high school guidance counseling offices have lists of scholarships - here is Chiles':

<http://www.leonschools.net/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&ModuleInstanceID=17312&ViewID=C9E0416E-F0E7-4626-AA7B-C14D59F72F85&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=10172&PageID=11214>

- Never pay money for help with finding scholarships
- Most colleges require students applying for aid to fill out a FAFSA - Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Even if you don't think you will qualify for need-based aid, fill it out anyway - and quickly. Save your last pay stub for December and use it to estimate your income. You can update it with final numbers later, but a lot of aid is first-come, first-serve, and is handed out quickly to those who are ready.

Faith Formation

- Select Lighthouse CDs for the teens to listen to while driving to/from school. Pray the Rosary while you're driving together. Teach them to say the Guardian Angel Prayer after they put on their seatbelt.
- Go to adoration as a family before school once a week
- Attend youth group at a Catholic church. Different ones appeal to different kids - don't be afraid to go to one at a parish other than your own. Set reasonable expectations - no, most of the other kids won't be as serious about their faith as you are, but they will grow as they get older, and you have a chance to practice some leadership skills. It can also be a valuable reconnection time for SHHE kids on different high school paths.

General

- Save EVERYTHING - programs from piano recitals and Share Day, certificates from anything - you never know when they're going to come in handy for something. Keep it all in a box or folder for each child. NEVER give original documentation away unless you absolutely must - and keep color copies that can pass for duplicate originals in a pinch.
- Lots of organizations send offers in the mail, saying your student has been selected for something like "Who's Who Among American High School Students". These have no value - save your money. Students sometimes get fliers from "Leadership Conferences" like this one, which are very expensive and have lists of other students from their school who have attended. These give no advantage in admissions or scholarships, and any "connections" they promote making are probably nonexistent. <http://www.nslcleaders.org/>
- If your student wants to find out more about a given discipline, many colleges have weeklong residential summer programs - this is particularly true for engineering. It's far less common in Florida than neighboring states. These are generally far less expensive than the above, and can provide a mini introduction to residential college life. The only programs that give college admissions advantages are those you have to compete to attend - examples include the Naval Academy Summer STEM for rising 8-11th graders, and the SAME Engineering and Construction Camps (which can be free if you're selected). FSU's Summer Music Camps are excellent, and right here in town.
- Keep taking your students for annual physical exams every year in middle and high school. You never know when some activity (Scouts, sports, camps and dual

enrollment are the most common) will surprisingly have a physical health form that needs to be filled out.

GENERAL FACTS AND FIGURES-TYPE INFO

Public School Athletics/Activities for Homeschoolers

- Public schools are required to allow homeschoolers to participate in extracurricular activities if there is an element of interscholastic competition - whether academic or athletic. Home school students have to meet the same eligibility criteria as the students enrolled in the school. This includes trying out if required, meeting test score or other criteria, and submitting reports on academic progress to maintain eligibility. This can be a lot of work - start long before the season begins, contacting schools and coaches. Some extracurricular academic activities like Brain Bowl may require tryouts as well.
- Public schools are not required to offer gifted services to non-enrolled students, although they are usually willing. If you think your child may qualify, you can attempt to make an appointment to have them tested by the school psychologists. However, schools are not required to offer these services if you are not enrolled. An alternative testing method can be the Florida State University Psychology Clinic. There is a fee (about \$200), and the process can take 2-3 months to accomplish: <https://psy.fsu.edu/community/clinic/services.htm#serv>. The only benefit gifted students receive in middle school is to be taught by at least one teacher who has been trained as a gifted educator; in elementary school, students are generally pulled out of regular classes to meet together for special activities.

High School Credits

- Every course offered by the public school system statewide is listed here, in the Comprehensive Course Code Table. Private schools also use the system. This listing determines which courses can be offered for honors credit (a “Y” in the weighted column), and whether the course is a semester (.5 credit) or a full year (1.0 credit). Courses that carry a 1.0 credit can’t be subdivided and taken for .5 credit for a semester. Credits listed under “Dual Enrollment” can only be used for that course number taken at a community college. If you’re doing your own transcript, especially to give to a brick-and-mortar school, it may be wise to include these specific numbers to be sure they receive honors credit:

https://www.osfaffelp.org/bfiehs/fnbpcm02_CCTMain.aspx

- Be aware of what category a course is listed under. “Literature and the Arts” sounds like an English class, but the course table calls it an elective, so you can’t earn one of the four required English credits by using that course number. Similarly, there are electives that sound like science courses, but they don’t count toward the three required science credits.

Grade Point Average/Class rank

- Most colleges ask for both weighted and unweighted grade point averages. Weighted averages are computed by assigning extra points for honors, AP and Dual Enrollment courses. A's in regular courses are worth 4.0, in honors courses 4.5, and in AP and DE courses, 5.0. The median GPA of FSU admitted freshmen is 4.0.
- Four courses required for high school graduation cannot be given honors credit - the first two years of any language and Fine/Practical arts courses, and HOPE. Electives - nonacademic courses like culinary arts, drafting, drama, chorus, music, dance - are also not available as honors until the third course in a sequence is taken.
- Class rank is how your GPA compares with your peers at your school - the student with the highest weighted GPA in their class has a class rank of 1. This information is generally printed on public school grade reports. JPPII does not officially rank students until after the first semester of senior year. This information is often requested on college admission and scholarship applications; being in the top 10, 20, or 25% of your class are the most common cutoffs. JPPII, if needed for a serious reason before they officially release class ranks, can sometimes write letters indicating which of these categories your student falls into.
- Brick and mortar school students are very aware of the effect of the courses they choose on their GPA. Ambitious ones take FLVS courses in the summer or as overloads during the school year to gain more knowledge, clear space in schedules for more advanced courses during the year, or to stay or get ahead in the GPA/class rank competition.

Graduation Requirements/SUS Admissions Standards

- State graduation requirements for public school students can be found here, based on the year your student was a freshman. While private schools are not obligated to follow these, most do.

<http://fldoe.org/academics/graduation-requirements/>

- They track closely with the minimum standards the State University System requires of applicants. Students who don't have these minimum credits will not be accepted for admission at any state university. Most students have far more than the minimums. FSU's relevant page is here:

<http://www.admissions.fsu.edu/freshman/requirements/>

This link leads to the admissions requirement for all public universities:

<http://www.flbog.edu/forstudents/ati/ugradadmissions.php>

Bright Futures

- Bright Futures Scholarships offer varying amounts to students who meet certain requirements. The amounts and requirements change almost every year - it's

important to read the information every fall your child is in high school, and it's helpful to know as early as middle school. The general page is here:

<http://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org/ssfad/bf/>

The specific information for homeschooled students is here:

<http://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org/ssfad/PDF/BFHomeEdGuide.pdf>

- The two major levels are Academic and Medallion. Academic Scholars need ACT/SAT scores of 29/1290, excluding the writing sections. The Academic scholarship was \$106 per credit hour for 2015-16. That pays for substantially all of the cost at TCC, and about a third of the cost at FSU per credit hour.
- Medallion Scholars need ACT/SAT scores of 27/1220 excluding the writing sections. The Medallion scholarship was \$77 per credit hour in 2015-16.
- Transcripts come into play if you would like to use a lower ACT/SAT score to obtain (only) a Medallion Scholarship. If you can document a weighted GPA of 3.0 in their specified college preparatory curriculum, then your student needs only a 26/1170. Be VERY aware if your student is homeschooled of the limits on their transcripts.
- Brick-and-mortar student must document a weighted GPA of 3.5 for Academic and 3.0 for Medallion for a specified number of courses in each area; this is rarely a problem.
- Be VERY aware of the extensive documentation of service hours needed by ALL students - see "service hours".