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# The American High School Diploma

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### Introduction

It is that time of the year where most of us are settled in the chosen subjects and working towards our set objectives. A time to breath! A time to reflect; to research. In this issue we investigate the transition from primary to high school level, provide you with an overview of the subjects taken by a local Diploma-graduate who has recently started her engineering studies at UP, and have an in-depth interview with a Diploma-family.

If this is an introduction to the American High School Diploma in South Africa to you, and you want to know more about the Diploma, be sure to pick-up [Issue 01](#) where FAQ's pertaining to the American High School Diploma has been answered.

### Transition from Primary School to High School

In Diploma seminars / consultation, a frequent asked question is: "What should I do with my primary school child to ensure he/she is ready for high school?"

Now granted, the answer to this question does depend *inter alia* on your child's environment, abilities, subject exposure and progression up to date, as well as his/her future aspirations. The answer herewith is thus generic in nature with the specific intend to provide you with a framework to work from and individualize for your child(ren). For this article, the focus has been limited to the legal and academic requirements, and we strongly recommend that you continue to consider the other developmental needs too:



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### Legal and special considerations

In South Africa, your child have the right and should receive education up to the age of 15<sup>i</sup>. The [Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements \(CAPS\)](#) provides a set of minimum requirements. Whilst the pandemic has seen a rise in the number of homeschool students following a CAPS curriculum at home, plenty South African homeschoolers adapt international requirements, using resources typically from either American, British, and/or non-CAPS South African curriculum providers to go above and beyond.

Registering with a curriculum provider does not exempt you from the legal requirement to register with your provincial Department of Basic Education (DBE). Many of our South African families opt to register rather with the Pestalozzi Trust, or with both their provincial DBE and the Pestalozzi Trust.

As you transition to your high school years, you can rest assure that the American High School Diploma is worldwide well established and accepted. Specifically in South Africa, it is included in the South African Matriculation Board regulations for university exemption purposes ([USAf's USA Regulations](#)). For university study in South Africa, it is your responsibility as parents to ensure that your Diploma service provider is locally recognized by USAf.

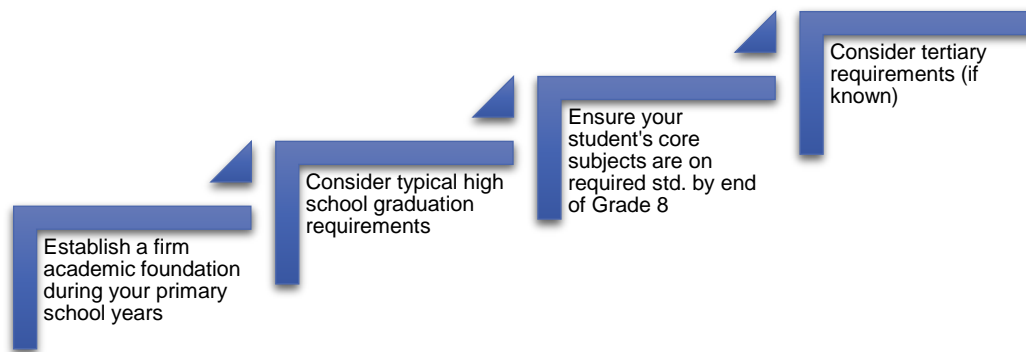
Furthermore, for both international and South African based tertiary studies, you as family is accountable to ensure that the specific admission requirements of your child's intended tertiary institution (post high school) are considered and addressed in your child's high school educational plan.

### Academic considerations

Understanding that there are different educational approaches and philosophies, the focus of this section deals more with the 'what', and less on the 'how' to prepare your child for high school (the Grade 9 to 12 years). The following factors come to play and is discussed in more detail:

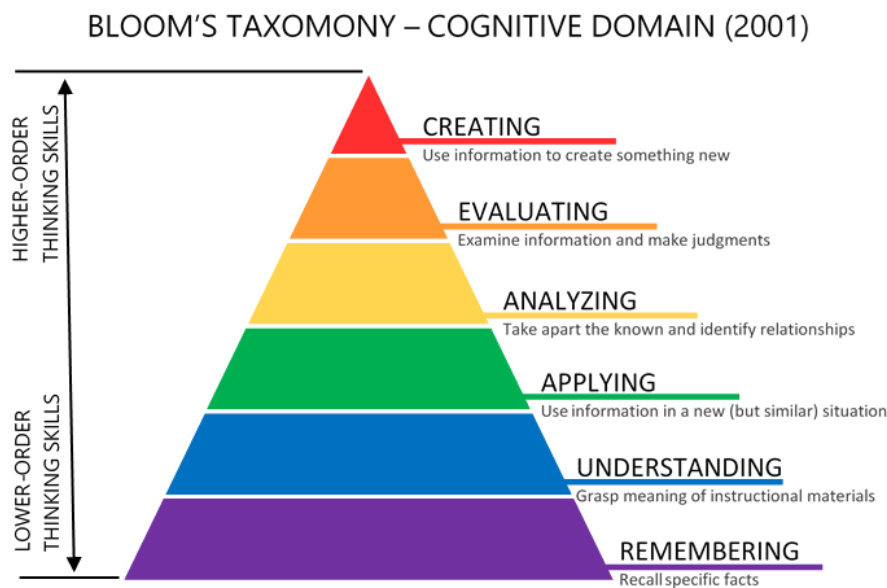
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## a. Establish a firm foundation

Bloomer's Taxonomy<sup>ii</sup> to higher order thinking is well known. Establishing a firm foundation during the primary school years in language arts, mathematics, and subject vocabulary is thus fundamental in building the lower-level cognitive skills in order to encourage higher-order thinking skills in later years.



At our institution, we typically recommend the following subjects (all interlaced with creative activities) for primary school children:

- 1) Language(s)
- 2) Maths
- 3) Social Studies and/or Science
- 4) Physical Education

## b. Consider typical high school graduation requirements

It will serve you well to consider the requirements for high school graduation already during your primary & middle school years (Gr 1-8), as these will provide a framework of where your children should ideally be at the end of

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Grade 8. As each US state, jurisdiction/district and/or academy/school have their own graduation requirements, the specifics of graduation requirements usually differs from one academy/school to another, and is described by the:

- Subject areas required (i.e. English, Sciences)
- Amount of subjects per subject area (1 to 4)
- Level / content of each subject.
- Minimum amount of credits required: usually 22-24 credits towards a university preparatory diploma.

Typically included in high school graduation requirements are the following subject areas with the indicated amount of years required per subject area.

Subject areas A-D in the figure is characteristically defined as your core courses, and more restrictions normally apply to these more rigorous academic subjects. We'll discuss these in more detail in a little while. For subject areas E-G, you will have more freedom of choice, with fewer academic prerequisites. Furthermore, we are blessed that some of our Diploma SA service providers will allow your child to take your home language as a foreign language, so you can pursue that during the primary school years with confidence.

### Unpacking the core courses (A-D):

#### Social Studies (A)

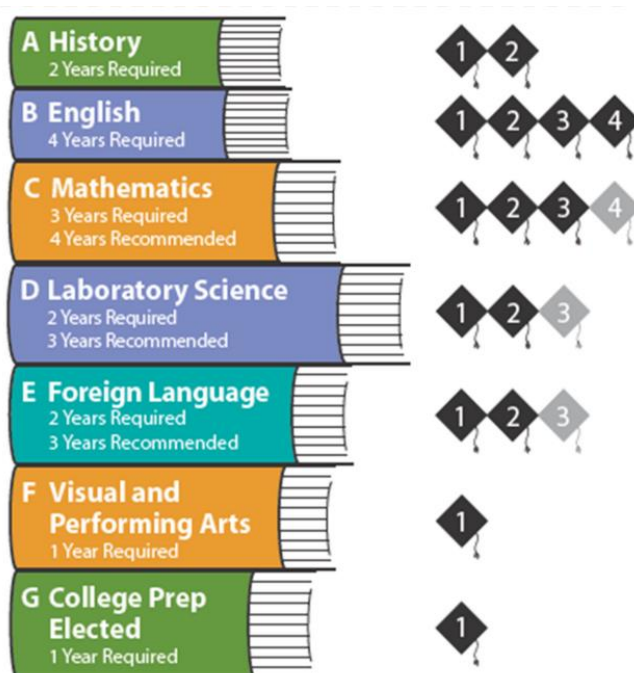
There are plenty of subject choices available in this subsection and might include History (World/SA/US), Geography, Philosophy, Economics (Micro/Macro), etc. You can thus enjoy exploring these topics during the primary school years.

#### English (B)

The requirement for high school is to have 4 years of Grade 9+ level of English. Some local Diploma service providers will allow you to pursue English as your first additional language if you want to follow your home language as your first language. The nature and content of the English subjects are dependent on your curriculum provider, and predictably include grammar, composition, and literature – either in an integrated or focused manner.

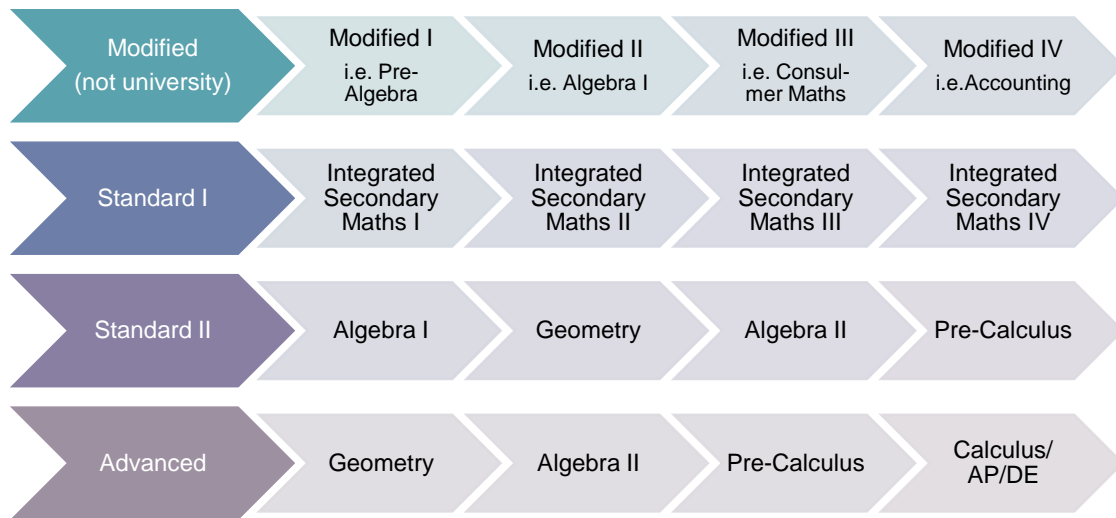
#### Mathematics (C)

The sequence of mathematics during high school will depend on your student and his/her ability and post-school aspirations. For illustration purposes, we've add some of the different pathways which can be taken.



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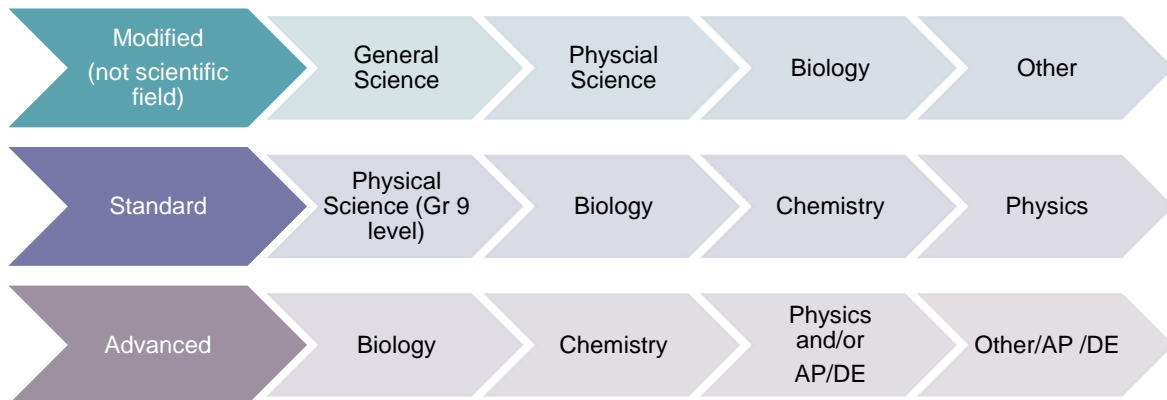
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### Science (D)

For those planning to continue with university studies, it is recommended to take at least two years of laboratory science during high school. And yes, homeschool and plenty of the online courses incorporates this in their curriculums, and can be done effectively from home. Doing hands-on science during primary school is thus a fun and effective way to prepare your child.

Herewith some of the traditional high school science pathways. As you can also see from the next section in this article (*Roadmap to Engineering Studies at UP*), alternative pathways are possible:



### c. Ensure the student's core subjects are on standard

Depending on your child's progression up to date, ability and aspirations, transitioning to high school will be easiest if your student's core subjects are on Grade 8 level prior to transitioning to high school. Some student's might need more time in developing their skills in certain subjects, or may opt to follow a minimum Diploma (thus without university exemption). That is the beauty of the Diploma – you can do that!

### d. Consider tertiary study requirements

The content described previously does not take the specific admission requirements from you intended tertiary institution or your own requirements into account, although the standard approach above with great marks should get you admitted to most universities. It is strongly recommended that you should thus supplement what is described here with those requirements (which is readily available from the Admissions page of your university of choice).

### Case Study: Roadmap to Engineering Studies at UP

One of our South African students who graduated during 2020 from [Home Life Academy](#) were recently accepted by the University of Pretoria (UP) to commence with Industrial Engineering. The family graciously agreed to share her high school roadmap herewith to give you as reader an indication of an acceptable roadmap for this course of study at a local university:

#### UP Engineering Student Subjects & Material during High School

Subject area	School credits required	Grade 9			Grade 10			Grade 11			Grade 12-2024			Total Credits			
English	4	English 09	Cambridge Checkpoint Gr 8-9	1	English 10	Cambridge aligned course with tutor	1	English 11	Cambridge aligned course with tutor	1	English 12	Cambridge, IEB & NSC aligned tutor	1	4			
Science	3	Science 09	Apologia General Science	1	Science 10	Full GED science completed	1	Science 11	Discovering Design with Chemistry	1	Physical Science	Apologia Physics	1	4			
Maths	4	Maths 09	Math-U-See Geometry	1	Maths 10	Math-U-See Algebra II	1	Mathematics-Pre-Calculus	Math-U-See Pre-Calculus	1	Maths-12	Math-U-See & MasterMaths	1	4			
Social Studies	3				World History	Story of the World 1-4 & Church History	1				Ancient History	Various books with book reports	1	3			
											South African History	Various books with book reports	1				
Foreign Language	2							Afrikaans FAL	Cambridge IGCSE Afrikaans	1	Afrikaans FAL	Cambridge AS Afrikaans	1	2			
Personal Finance	0.5							Personal Finance	Basic Bookkeeping (Oikos)	0.5				0.5			
Physical Education	1	Physical Education 09	Softball & Horse Riding	1	Physical Education 10	Softball & Horse Riding	1							2			
Health/ Wellness	0.5	Health 09	First Aid course with practical	0.5										0.5			
Computer	1				Computer Applications	Cambridge IGCSE course	1	Application Computer Technology	CAT Year 1 course	1	Application Computer Technology	PAT computer course	1	3			
Performing Arts	1	Music 09	Gr 4 Trinity Music Theory	1	Music Choir	Bronberg Children's Choir	1	Music Theory Grade 6	Gr 6 Trinity Music Theory	1				5			
		Music Theory	Gr 6 Classical Saxophone	1	Music Piano	Gr 7	1										
Electives	2	Biblical Counselling	25 books with book reports	1										1			
Total/year		Grade 9			7.5	Grade 10			8	Grade 11			6.5	Grade 12-2024			7
Cumulative total high school credits		Grade 9			7.5	Grades 9-10			15.5	Grades 9-11			22	Grades 9-12			29

Furthermore, the student followed the following process for university admission:

- 1) She applied to UP for her Engineering studies (during Grade 12).
- 2) On high school graduation, she applied to USAf to obtain her university exemption certificate as this is a requirement for all international matric options. She submitted her American Diploma, High School Transcript, SAT Score Report, and exemption application payment, and received university exemption within an hour.
- 3) Subsequently, she provided this Exemption Certificate to UP in support of her earlier application. Her placement as first year engineering student was confirmed within a couple of days.

### Interview with a Diploma-family

**DiplomaTimesRSA** had the opportunity to interview another Diploma-homeschool family, who provided us with insight in their educational journey thus far. Hanlie Wentzel (Eastern Cape), thank you for taking the time to share your journey with us.

1. *Hanlie, please introduce your family and your children's' (current) future aspirations.*

To tell you a little more about our family - we are an Afrikaans family of four. We have 2 boys, aged 15 and 11. My husband is very supportive and pro homeschooling, especially since he can see the wide range of benefits in our boys' lives. Not just the academics and their cognitive development, but especially their character development

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and socio-emotional wellness. My husband is a CA and has his own business. I have worked as a Social Worker and specialized in Addictions Counselling, Christian Counselling and Art Therapy.

Our eldest son was in grade 3 when we took him out of public school and his younger brother was still in preschool. Like every family, I suppose, we had a catalyst that made us take the brave leap of faith to start homeschooling. Our eldest son did very well in mainstream school on the surface - he excelled academically, enjoyed participating in sports and had lots of friends. But then he started to develop an autoimmune illness (diagnosed by a pediatrician), triggered by the stress of the school environment. Interesting enough, the autoimmune illness miraculously cleared up within a few weeks after taking him out of school. We prayed about it as a family and just felt a very strong calling and conviction to homeschool our children and also to raise them in the ways of the Lord and to give them a faith based education.



Our eldest son who is 15 years old is currently working towards his American High School Diploma (Honors Pathway). He is 2e (neurodiverse) and homeschooling is just a wonderful flexible learning environment for him. He has a wide range of special interests and pursues them with the hyper focus that is typical of neurodiverse kids. He is very interested in Philosophy, Psychology, Literature and the Sciences. He is also a creative and spends a lot of time researching and doing his own delight directed learning in the areas of Art & Design, Architecture, Visual Development and Animation. He would like to study and pursue a career in Animation and Visual Development, for example to study at the Animation School in Cape Town or do a degree in Art/ Animation at a university.

His younger brother who is 11 is just wired differently. He is also 2e (neurodiverse) and he loves learning and needs a lot of mental stimulation. He loves numbers and math, things like gaming, coding and engineering. He is still in his primary years, but would probably pursue a career in Accounting like his dad, or maybe Coding or Engineering.

### *2. Tell us more about your homeschooling journey towards the American High School Diploma?*

We have been homeschooling for just over 8 years. From the start homeschooling was just a very good fit for us as a family.

The primary years are easy and carefree, with the main aim to cultivate a love of learning. To develop each child in his individual bend and aptitude, to focus on delight directed learning, as well as develop self-discipline, a growth mindset and perseverance in areas that's harder for them to work at.

We started with ACE, because I felt we needed the structure and support of being part of an Academy. It worked very well for us and helped us to make the transition from mainstream schooling to homeschooling. Our children loved homeschooling straight away and it was wonderful to see how they flourished.

After 2 years I felt more comfortable to try a more eclectic approach since I really wanted to apply the Charlotte Mason philosophy in our homeschool. We changed to Sonlight as our core curriculum for a few years with Math-u-see, Afrikaans Sonder Grense, Handwriting Without Tears, and I supplemented and enriched it with other

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resources and delight directed learning as needed. I did a year of The Good and the Beautiful with my younger son as his core curriculum, doing the Language Arts, Science and History. We also did Ambleside's Music and Art Appreciation. And of course loads of Living Books! The American curriculum is so versatile, extremely homeschool friendly and there are so many wonderful service providers and philosophies to choose from. When my eldest was in grade 8 we started with more formal online schooling to prepare and align him for the formal high school track (grade 9 to 12). I wanted to make sure that there were no learning gaps since we have been doing eclectic homeschooling for a few years with no formal assessments or tests/exams.

He did the SwitchedOn Curriculum through Active Academy for 18 months (wonderful curriculum and staff, very supportive) and then we hit a bump in the road. We tried Cambridge for a few months and that also just didn't work for him - it was quite a challenging time for me - since I wanted to provide a stable learning environment and continuity. But I just knew we had to keep on looking until we found the right fit for him and his specific needs. In the end we found the right approach and fit for him with [Acellus Academy](#) that suited his neurodiversity, temperament, his interests and his learning styles. He is also enrolled in an UK based art school where he is doing an [IGCSE equivalent in Art & Design](#).



I am still following an eclectic approach for the younger brother, aged 11, who is in middle school. We recently added blended learning where he started to do more online schooling through Power Homeschool [Power Homeschool](#) (they use the Acellus curriculum but it is parent led and not an accredited online school). Their learning platform and subjects are very engaging and interesting, like Elementary Engineering and Introduction to Coding, Foundations of Music etc. It is a good transition from primary school to middle school and by the time he reaches grade 9 he will be well prepared for the more formal stage of his education.

3. *Within your home educational journey - and in particular with the Diploma - what did you find worked well?*

We have been doing the American curriculum from the start, although in different forms and with different service providers like ACE, Sonlight, Math-u-see, Apologia, The Good and the Beautiful, SwitchedOn and Acellus. It depended on where we were in our own homeschool journey and what the kids' educational needs were at that stage of their development.

We struggled a lot in the beginning of high school to choose between the UK national curriculum (Cambridge Matric) and the US national curriculum (American High School Diploma). I did a lot of research and found that it is a common problem, since the two are so well matched, they are the #1 and #2 top curricula in the world, with the US national curriculum #1 in 2020.

Both are excellent international school leaving certificates that provide a matric with exemption in South Africa, through the South African Matriculation Board / USAf for university bound students. The American High School Diploma (Honors Pathway) is equivalent to a Cambridge A levels matric. So in the end it's a matter of preference.

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I found that there is also a false perception in South Africa that Cambridge is more prestigious and the American High School Diploma is often confused with the GED and not a lot of people are familiar with it. But in the end you have to find what works for your family. For us the American curriculum is just wonderful. It is so flexible and versatile and there are so many ways to apply it in your homeschooling. It worked well with an eclectic approach in the primary and middle school years. You can easily combine it with other resources and service providers since the scope and sequence in the subjects and grades are the same. For high school it is also fantastic since it is once again versatile, you can use an umbrella school or an accredited online school. There are so many interesting and career oriented subjects to choose from. It is self-paced and all the exams are online and for us it has been so much more affordable, especially in comparison with Cambridge.

We are also very grateful to be a part of the homeschool community in Hermanus. We never feel isolated and alone and we have made wonderful friends with other like minded families.



#### 4. Which pitfalls can you bring under our attention to help other families?

One pitfall I can mention is that there is a year gap between South African grade levels and US/UK grade levels in Math. I wasn't aware of that and because our eldest started in the SA school system I just kept him on a SA grade level for Math. So we actually had to fill in a whole year of Math when he started grade 8 - that was quite a challenge. A great resource to use is [Elephant Learning](#); he was able to catch up with a year's Math within 3 months.

Also don't get tripped up when you make the transition from primary/middle school to high school. It is just a different phase in your child's homeschool journey and when they get there they will be mentally and psychologically ready for the challenge.

#### 5. Any further advice / words of wisdom?

Don't be afraid to explore and try different things. You know your child and his/her specific needs. The right fit is out there - just keep looking. Also make use of the support out there, reach out and ask questions, it is a huge amount of data and information to process. There is wisdom in the counsel of many. Be kind to yourself, it takes time to find your feet, and you have to gather a whole new body of knowledge and a whole new skill set.

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Never stop learning and educating yourself, it's not only the kids that have to adapt and change and grow - as homeschool parents we are on a continuous journey of discovery.

"Don't be victimized by others' perceptions of right and wrong. Stand firm in your own convictions."

You can't be led by others' good or bad examples, stay teachable, listen to their advice, but choose your own path.

Above all else, what always carries me, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path."

Blessings from our homeschooling family to yours! Hanlie Wentzel



## In Conclusion

In DiplomaTimesRSA Issue 01, we discussed popular Diploma service providers for homeschool families in South Africa. For ease of reference, here they are again:

Popular American High School Diploma providers	
With South African operations	Without South African operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Active Home Education Institute</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Educ8 SA</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Home Life Academy</a> with two local offices:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ <a href="#">Diversio Learning</a></li><li>◦ <a href="#">Kairos Academy SA</a></li></ul></li><li>• <a href="#">Pure Life Academy</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Southern African Virtual School</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Acellus Academy</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Alpha Omega Academy</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Bridgeway Academy</a></li><li>• <a href="#">University of Nebraska High School</a></li><li>• Also, consider: <a href="#">30 Best Online High Schools for 2021</a></li></ul>

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Let's  
Connect

## Stay in Touch!

Please stay in touch and let us know what further topics you would like to read about:

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- Support, encouragement, and knowledge sharing during your homeschooling journey.
- Educational consultations and administrative support.
- A South African community of like-minded families, with a collective strive towards excellence.

## Upcoming Articles in Issue 03

- **Explained: differences between online and umbrella schools**
- **A sporty child and homeschooling? No problem**  
Sport opportunities for homeschoolers and international scholarships.

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<sup>i</sup> South Africa school-leaving age

<sup>ii</sup> [Bloom's Taxonomy - Center for Instructional Technology and Training - University of Florida \(ufl.edu\)](http://Bloom's.Taxonomy-Center.for.Instructional.Technology.and.Training-University.of.Florida.ufl.edu)