

National Honor Society for Homeschoolers

Contributed by Cathy Barfield
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Recently many homeschoolers have been interested in joining an honor society for homeschool high schoolers in the Lawrence area sponsored by TEACH. This article is to encourage your support group to consider starting your own local chapter of the National Honor Society for homeschool students called Eta SigmaAlpha.

Founded in 1999 by Joanne E. Juren, M.Ed., Executive Director of the Home Education Partnership of Texas, it has grown into a national organization with 100 local chapters in 28 states and one chapter in Mexico.

Why did the national organization begin?

As a former public school administrator, Juren contacted the National Honor Society with the intent of forming a homeschool chapter for her sons and others in a local support group in 1997. When told that NHS did not accept homeschool students, Juren decided to start a new honor society for homeschoolers. Over the next two years, the idea for Eta Sigma Alpha was refined and the "Alpha" chapter was started in 1999 through the Home Education Partnership of Texas.

History of the name

Eta, the Greek letter that is shaped like an "h" and Sigma, the letter for "s" were chosen, along with Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet. Thus Eta Sigma Alpha means the "first homeschool" honor society.

National chapter functions

The national chapter establishes the guidelines for ESA membership. It also charters chapters, coordinates information about chapters for prospective members, and provides information on starting a chapter to interested groups. Each local chapter is self-governed and establishes its own by-laws and rules for membership. The ESA's National Office is not involved in the day-to-day function of the chapters and is not liable for the actions of individual chapters or members.

Mandatory requirements to be a member:

A student must be in high school and meet one of the following test scores:

- 90% composite score on Stanford or Iowa Achievement Test
- SAT score of 1800
- ACT score of 26
- PSAT score of 180 (add the math and verbal score together)

Additional Requirements as established by each individual chapter may include:

1) 3.5 grade point average based on a 4.0 scale. This GPA may include the parent transcript, early admission college courses, co-op or support group homeschool class grades, or similar coursework supervised/directed by the homeschooling parent.

2) Letters of recommendation

3) Essay written by applicant

4) Other requirements established by the By-laws of each chapter

Chapters should have two deep leadership which means a minimum of two sponsors. We also recommend that chapters have a minimum of five eligible students to start a chapter. By-laws are to be developed by the students and made available to prospective members.

Mission Statement

“The purpose of Eta Sigma Alpha National Home School Honor Society shall be to recognize and encourage scholarship among home school students. To achieve this purpose, Eta Sigma Alpha National Home School Honor Society shall provide opportunities for the development of leadership and service. Eta Sigma Alpha shall encourage the development of an intellectual climate that will stimulate the exchange of ideas and ideals, foster scholarship, and promote academic excellence. Eta Sigma Alpha shall also advocate homeschooling as a viable and successful educational methodology and act as a liaison for homeschooling to the general public, colleges/universities, and the media.”

Universities are looking for more than academic performance.

These institutions like to see involvement in extra curricular activities, offices held, and volunteer/service projects the students have performed throughout their high school experience. Scholarships are most often awarded to students that demonstrate not only academic success but also leadership potential. Colleges will look for the student’s involvement on their transcripts and résumés. Membership in the national homeschool society gives the homeschool students equal footing to National Honor Society students when they are in competition for scholarships and college admissions.

Why and How to Start a Local Chapter

The goals of the honor society is not just a student’s name on a list but a real working club where students elect officers among themselves

and work together on service projects. This makes it necessary for the clubs to be "local." I would encourage you to start one in your area. Each chapter registers with the national society paying a one time chapter charter fee of \$10 and yearly dues of \$15. Each chapter will receive a Chapter Certificate and be assigned a chapter name (TEACH's chapter is called the Phi Gamma Chapter). Each chapter needs two adults for leadership guidance and at least 5 members (although they will accept 3-4). The national requirement is the test score. The local chapter may decide other requirements for their chapter.

Phi Gamma requires two recommendations, a yearly transcript with a GPA to be maintained at 3.5, an essay about themselves, and to regularly attend the meetings. We meet at least once/month but sometimes more depending on the service project. Types of service projects we have done are: collected used cell phones with chargers and donated them to a local women's battered shelter, cleaned and provided meals at a local homeless shelter, collected food for a food pantry and collected items to make care packages to encourage the troops stationed in Iraq (i.e. lip balm, dried fruit, wet wipes, reader's digests or Country magazine and etc).

As a group, we have not established any yearly dues for the individual members but the dues could provide "seed money" needed to start many of the service projects. So far they have raised money needed for the service projects.

The bigger chapters will often have special induction ceremonies which we have not done so far although the sponsorship group (TEACH of Lawrence) does purchase a gold honor cord for each of the honor society members to wear with their cap and gown on graduation day. TEACH pays the yearly dues to ESA and collects the paperwork on each member to give an accounting to the national group if asked for it.

To Apply For A Chapter Charter

If interested in forming a chapter, please contact HEP of Texas for a charter application. You can contact Eta Sigma Alpha National Home School Honor Society at (281) 922-0478 or via their web site. Joanne Juren is the National Executive Director and will be delighted to answer questions about starting a new chapter. Desiree Dillard is the administrative assistant who processes all applications. She may be reached from 9 a.m.-1 p.m..