

As I put together the start of my son's high school transcript and ponder about the reality of living in other states where even elementary and middle school homeschooling need to have counted hours of instruction, I realized something about religious education hours.

Caveat regarding my background: I am strong supporter of parish religious education and have spent over 20 years as a parish catechist beginning in high school. I served as Coordinator of Religious Education at our local parish for a year (our parish is one parish on 4 campuses), was the main person setting up the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd atrium for level 1 in two of the parish locations, set up two level 2 atrium; later assisted in fleshing them out more fully and training catechists, while setting up the level 3 atrium at one of the campuses. My homeschooled-all-the-way-through son has attended religious ed at our local parish since he was 1 (from age 1-3 by necessity, thereafter with his age-appropriate class). *I fully support parish religious education.*

I have wondered at times about homeschoolers who say no to the parish religious education program, even with it is Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, but they aren't opposed to "mixing" with public schooled children so that's not why they don't come.

I saw something today. I'm honestly not sure how many homeschool parents have actually thought this through on a practical level, but have responded to it intuitively.

Our local religious ed program is 28 sessions for 1 ½ hour each time. 42 hours of instruction time for the entire school year. Most other parishes in the general vicinity are 45-60 minutes each class, maybe meeting 20-25 sessions – or 15-25 hours of religious education instruction for the entire year. Our local archdiocese would like to see a minimum of 30 hours of instruction time, over the course of an entire school year.

Let's look at the transcript. To record a credit for a full year, 180 hours of instruction time must be achieved. Public schools have some room for padding this – 48-53 minute classes can count for 1 instruction hour at our local public high school. In a 180 day school year, children can have a certain number of excused and unexcused absences, thus reducing the number of attended hours; as well as school events, fire drills, and other occurrences that cut into this time. Homeschoolers tend to go for recording actual instruction time for the entire 180 hours needed. We are already outside the norm, we don't usually want to invite any questions on how well we are following the law.

180 hours for an entire year. This is 90 instruction hours for a one semester course. 45 instruction hour for a quarter-year course.

Even our generous local parish does not provide a full 45 hours of instruction time through the entire school year. Not even enough to count for a quarter-year course on a transcript, if using the full clock hour definition.

This is why many homeschoolers intuitively don't see the value of the parish religious ed program: in a sense, the pastors and the DREs are saying "we are providing less than a quarter-year course of instruction on the faith."

I understand we parents are fully responsible for our children's faith formation and that the parish is supposed to be an assist to that noble undertaking. By offering so few hours of instruction (setting aside teacher quality, curriculum quality, scheduling issues, how much we study the faith at home already, setting all that aside! And focusing on the number of hours provided), the parish religious ed program is saying of itself "we don't value religious instruction enough to provide even the public school equivalent of a quarter-year course."

At 42 hours, our local parish provides more actual instruction hours than our local public schools do for a quarter length course, considering their usual classes are 51

minutes long but get to count for a full “hour.”

This still leaves me wondering – a quarter-year course on something that is so foundational to our very being.

And it leaves me understanding why those same homeschoolers who say no to the regular religious ed program leap at the opportunity for a 2-hour weekly atrium that meets 30 sessions – providing 60 hours of actual instruction time which is only 16 ½ hours short of a full semester course, with time each session for intense, deep experiences and discussions. These families see something of value – value for their time, their children’s intelligence, their family’s faith formation.

	Official Definition	Public school	Homeschool
		don’t usually finish the book; absentee time still counted as instruction time (up to a point)	finish the textbook, add in supplements to fill the time; absentee time not counted as instruction
1 year course	180 hours	51 minutes = 153 instruction hours;	180+ hours
½ year course Semester	90 hours	51 minute classes = 76.5 hours	90+ hours
¼ year course Quarter	45 hours	51 minutes = 38.25 hours	45+ hours